

Straight for Pay

**Lesbian and queer sex workers:
Understanding the effects of capital on
identity practices and connection to
community.**

By

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DEDICATION

To Bridget, and Pippa, and all of our other peers for whom the intersections were too much to carry. I wish you could see how we cry for you, how we dance for you. We carry on in the hope that the girls of tomorrow are allowed to exist.

ABSTRACT

Sex workers and lesbians have long been compared to, or grouped together with, deviants in the literature on female sexuality. To date, little attention has been paid to the women who are situated at the intersection – lesbian women working in the sex industry – despite an overrepresentation of lesbian women engaging in sex work.

Using a visual research method and qualitative approach to data collection, I argue that Bourdieu's theory of practice provides a rich theoretical structure to examine the identity and community experiences of these women. From a phenomenological standpoint, data were obtained through semi structured interviews with twenty women (n=20) who identified as current or past sex workers. Positioning myself as a peer researcher, following the traditions of sex working academics was integral to this project that focused on an over-researched and hard to reach population of sex workers. Participants responded enthusiastically to my position as a peer and the data generated were rich and reflexive.

I extend Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital to argue that lesbian sex workers possess two particular forms of cultural capital. I propose that Intra Industry Whore Capital (IIWC) and Community Whore Capital (CWC) are two field-specific forms of capital that exist due to the juxtaposition of a lesbian identifying sexuality identity and sex industry work with a heterosexual clientele. The overall finding of this study is the way in which two forms of whore capital, IIWC and CWC, are attached to the habitus. The habitus impacts the ability of the individual to navigate a range of fields including sex work and client interactions, familial relationships, and engagement with the queer community. In particular, participants with high levels of IIWC were able to navigate the field of the sex industry incredibly successfully by using a reflexive approach to understand and perform the role of heterosexual woman that they were expected to play. CWC, on the other hand, supported sex workers to navigate the field of contemporary queer communities with varying levels of success that were impacted by geographic and temporal contexts. Thus, I argue that these forms of capital are field-specific and unique to lesbian sex workers due to their position at the intersection of these two identities.

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NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

AFAB/AMAB	Assigned female at birth/ assigned male at birth. These terms are used widely in the medical field but have fallen out of popularity with the trans community who have argued that the sex assigned at birth is often irrelevant to the matter being discussed.
Civilians/Civs	The general public who have never engaged in sex work (the opposite of peers).
Decriminalisation/Decrim	A legal model where the sex industry is governed similarly to other businesses, where no specific licencing takes place and no form of sex work is illegal.
Girls	Participants used the term “girls” when describing fellow sex workers. This language denotes the infantilisation of women that occurs in the sex industry, and indeed in broader society, but is also a commonly used term among sex workers as shorthand.
Intro	When a prospective client attends a brothel or parlour setting, all available workers will introduce and present themselves one at a time for the client to then make a choice about his preference.
Legalisation	A legal model where the sex industry is regulated differently to general business activities, similarly to other industries such as gaming and the sale of liquor.
Lesbian	Within this thesis, I use the term lesbian to denote any individual who self identifies as such. Broadly, a lesbian is a woman who is attracted to other women, and not people of other genders. Lesbian is a contested and evolving term, understood differently by women across generations, political factions, and cultures more broadly. In historical and contemporary contexts, from the lesbian separatism seen at the 1976 Womyn’s Music Festival (Browne, 2011), to online spaces such as <i>Tumblr</i> (Oakley, 2016), lesbian is a particularly internally policed term around a person’s gender identity and sexual practices. My participant inclusion criteria contain a smaller subset of this term and this will be clearly outlined in Chapter Two.
Peer	Someone who is currently working, or has historically worked, in the sex industry.
Queer woman, queer person	An individual who is not heterosexual and/or cisgender. As is described below, queer has been used in an academic context as both a verb (to queer) and a noun (N. Sullivan, 2003). To understand its use as a noun in my research, I move away from the debate about ‘queering’ practices (e.g., queering sex work [Laing et al., 2015]) and, instead, use the term as an identity umbrella. What I refer to here is people (in my work, women) who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. These people may identify as lesbian, gay, transgender or non-binary, intersex, bisexual, asexual, or, as is the case for many people, simply not-cishet (cisgender


	<p>heterosexual). While there are hot debates about the most inclusive and correct way to describe these individuals, and a plethora of acronyms from LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual plus) to QUILTBAG (Queer/Questioning, Undecided, Intersex, Lesbian, Transgender/Transsexual, Bisexual, Asexual, and/or Gay/Genderqueer) (Bhugra, 2018), to GSD (Gender and Sexually Diverse), my understanding of the word queer is that it provides a flexible umbrella, recognising that gender and sexual identities are fluid and resist definition. My participant inclusion criteria contains a smaller subset of this term and this will be clearly outlined in Chapter Two.</p>
Sex worker	<p>The World Health Organisation’s definition of a sex worker is used within this work</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Female, male and transgender adults (18 years of age and over) who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally. Sex work is consensual sex between adults, can take many forms, and varies between and within countries and communities (UNAIDS, 2009, p. 3).</p> <p>For the purpose of this thesis, the term sex worker will refer to women (cisgender and transgender) who perform a sexual service for material gain. This gendered approach does not seek to invisibilise male or other gendered workers, but to focus the reader’s attention on the subjects at hand, and to recognise that the majority of sex workers (particularly in Western contexts) are women. Sex workers can include anyone who provides a sexual service from stripping, erotic massage, and porn to full-service and everyone in between. Anyone who self identifies as a sex worker is included in my understanding of the term.</p>
Transactional/informal sex work	<p>A sexual interaction that transpires between two or more individuals whereby one or more participants are compensated for their participation via gifts such as money, alcohol, drugs, or accommodation. Some people who engage in transactional sex may not categorise it as sex work. Some feminists argue that, for heterosexual women, most sex is transactional although that is not what is meant by the term herein.</p>
WLW	<p>A woman who loves women; a term preferred by some people who dislike the term lesbian because of its links to transphobic communities.</p>
Woman	<p>I use the term woman here to denote anyone who self identifies as a woman, regardless of sex assigned at birth, following the tradition of social constructionism and in recognition of the performative nature of gender (Butler, 2011). This includes cisgender and transgender women.</p>

Modes of work	
BDSM work	This can mean a range of services from online to in-person; no touching to full service. Usually, there is an element of power play including dominance and submission.
Brothel/Parlour	A venue where sex workers can provide their service to clients, usually known as brothels in South Australia, but as parlours in the eastern states. Workers often “rent” the rooms by paying a percentage of their earnings to the operator of the venue, however, the terms of these arrangements vary widely, particularly from state to state where their legality varies.
Cam girl/camming/online porn	This rapidly evolving field of work historically occurred on internet sites where a customer could pay for video content and/or live video sessions with a worker. Due to the proliferation of user-generated content sites, such as <i>OnlyFans</i> , this form of sex work is hugely popular and growing at an exponential rate (see Rodriguez, 2022; Safae, 2021).
Erotic Massage	Also known colloquially as a “rub ‘n’ tug”, this form of sex work does not usually include penis-in-vagina sex but can occur in a sex-on-premises venue and is booked similarly to brothel work. A worker may perform sexual acts including fellatio and strip tease.
Full-service Sex Work (FSSW/FSSWer)	Sex work that can include penetration and other forms of bodily contact between worker and client, often occurs in a brothel, in an outside venue, or in an incall (a venue that a sex worker uses to see clients) or an outcall (a clients’ venue that a sex worker visits to provide a service) outcall.
Outdoor/indoor	A sex work dichotomy more relevant to international locations where there is a proliferation of street/outdoor work. Outdoor sex work is often completely criminalised even where indoor work is legalised or decriminalised.
Party bookings	Adult industry entertainers, such as strippers or full-service sex workers, are booked to provide entertainment to an individual, but more often a group of clients, usually in a private home or licenced venue, such as for a buck’s night.
Street work	Sex work performed in an outdoor location, such as along a highway where the sex worker may enter a client’s vehicle or similar to perform the service.
Stripping/Stripper	Sometimes labelled “exotic dancer”, the term stripper will be used here to denote women who perform some element of a dance routine, lap dance, peep show, or similar (sometimes paired with a stage routine, but not always).
Sugaring/Sugar Babies	A form of work which usually involves an ongoing relationship where the client receives companionship, and varying levels of sexual and romantic intimacy, in exchange for money or other gifts.

	This work is sometimes paid in ongoing financial support like an “allowance”.
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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed..........

Date.....**07/04/2023**.....

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS ARISING FROM THIS THESIS

Toone, K. (2018). Come back for us: A critical reflection on the shared history of queers and sex workers and our need for solidarity [Essay]. *Hecate*, 44(1/2), 110.

<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.891295251515664>

Toone, K. (2018). *Queers and sex workers: shared history and a need for solidarity* [Conference presentation]. Australian Women's and Gender Studies Association 2018 Conference. Geelong, Australia.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background and purpose

This work was inspired by my own journey in thinking about, and at times wrestling with, my identity in relation to my sexuality, and also the sex work in which I have participated. I began to toy with the idea of non-heteronormative relationships and self-identity in my early twenties, accelerated by my move away from regional South Australia (Ngarrindjeri land) and closer to the City of Adelaide (Tarndanya) for my undergraduate degree in social work. Despite growing up in a reasonably liberal household, before then, it had not really occurred to me that I could be anything other than straight. Upon finding the queer community (mine made up of majority lesbians and some trans men), I felt a sense of belonging that I hadn't before realised was missing. At the same time as feeling this belonging, my place within this community always felt a bit fraught; I had been in a lot of heterosexual relationships and had become a mother at age 17, and back in the early 2010s people were still openly using terms such as "Gold Star Lesbian". Community rhetoric was rife with biphobic beliefs that posited that bisexual women were greedy, unsure, or heterosexual and faking queer identity for attention. Eventually, I felt self-assured enough to strut into lesbian nights at the Crown and Anchor Hotel, my stance declaring, "I belong here". Then, in the last years of my degree I began working in a brothel as a full-service sex worker. Although it was illegal, it was the most convenient and well-paid work available to me as a single, studying parent, and I didn't loathe it as much as other cash-in-hand roles I'd had. Because of the illegality and the stigma surrounding the sex industry, I disclosed my work to only a few select friends, but I still vividly remember the reactions that made me question and defend my queerness.

The reflexive internal interrogation began: Does having transactional sexual intercourse with men make me unable to claim my recently realised lesbianism? Does this mean that I was "faking it" all along and I don't belong in the queer community? Given I was engaging in sexual acts with men, was my queerness "just a phase", or an attempt at being "alternative" rather than a valid sexual identity? As so many queers before me have done, I looked to the literature in an attempt to find myself represented and to resolidify my belonging. I found plenty of popular literature showing the historical importance of sex work for the lesbian community, which I will present below. Unfortunately, though, my search into academic literature (what I felt would be "hard evidence")

was relatively fruitless, and so there was this discord. Here were lesbian sex workers, abound in novels, movies, and poetry... why hadn't anyone studied us? As Nestle asked in 1987:

Why has this seemingly obvious connection between lesbians and prostitutes gone unspoken in our current lesbian communities? What impact has cultural feminism and classism had on this silence? (Nestle, 1987, p. 245).

The literature on lesbian experiences has identified that lesbians deviate from what is expected of womanhood in contemporary heteronormative society and, similarly, sex working women transgress from expected sexual passivity to generate income from their inherently sexualised position as women (Payne, 2015). Despite historical and contemporary literature comparing these experiences, very little attention has been paid to the women who possess both identities concurrently. And, so, this project was born out of a desire to be represented, to be documented, or to "give back to working women their own history" (Nestle, 1987, p. 232). The contemporary landscape for sex workers and for queer people has significantly changed since my early inquiries that would eventually become this thesis. Thus, this work offers a window into a particular place in time, in a particular place in the world: the queer and sex worker communities of Adelaide and other Australian cities in the late twenty-tens.

Thus, both for political and personal reasons, it became clear to me that this work had to be done. (Nestle, 1987, p. 233)

Where were we?

Quinn Eades eloquently said in their reflection on the marriage equality survey, "I think about queer kinship and how do I trace my ancestors? Where is my lineage? My lineage is books, and dance floors, and documentaries – my lineage is not in my blood" (Eades, 2017, para. 3). Whilst we (lesbian and queer women who also identify as sex workers) were not represented in the academic literature in a way that reflected our existence, our lineage can be traced through the grey literature. Pendleton documented this as early as 1997.

Numerous historians and cultural critics have begun to document the rich history of lesbian sex workers; their work often highlights the stigmatized social spaces historically shared by whores and lesbians. Queer periodicals have increasingly devoted space to covering the hidden worlds of lesbian sex workers. (Pendleton, 1997, p. 74)

In fact, some of the most famous queer women's memoirs of recent times include narratives of sex work. Michelle Tea's work (Tea, 1998, 2000, 2004), a mixture of autobiographical and semi-fiction, include her own experiences of sex work and the experiences of other queer women around her. In particular, *Rent Girl* (2004) reflects on her time as a self-identifying "baby dyke"

needing to work in the sex industry for economic survival. Writing about Tea's legacy, Wilson (2019) unpacks the significance of another of her works, *Valencia* (Tea, 2000), stating that it "disrupts the idealization of access to heteronormative institutions and the rise of homonormativity to push for a transformational politics that critiques capitalist power structures" (L. E. Wilson, 2019, p. 26). Another scholar, McKenna (2018), turns her attention to Tea's debut novel, *The Passionate Mistakes and Intricate Corruption of One Girl in America* (1998), to argue that the work significantly positions Tea as an example of working-class resistance as she resists literary norms within the work. She writes, "Through her recollections of young queer desire and sex work, Tea's text makes visible the risks involved when poor and working-class women dare to write themselves into discourse" (McKenna, 2018, p. 470).

Another prominent example of femme lesbian sex workers appears in *Stone Butch Blues* (2003), a semi-autobiographical tome by the late Leslie Feinberg. Here, sex work is portrayed as one of few career opportunities for femmes in 1940s North America, whilst butches disguise themselves as men to work in factories. Feinberg paints an incredibly powerful picture of a time when sex workers, straight or otherwise, were on the fringes of middle America along with dykes, Jews, and other deviants. Even Joan Nestle (1987), a significant writer in the lesbian/dyke space, writes about her mother who was a sex worker. She shows us that even when lesbians themselves weren't sex workers, sex work existed as a normal and standard part of their lives in 20th century America. She tells of whores sitting side by side with dykes in bars, bracing for vice squad raids who saw them as "little different" from each other (Nestle, 1987, p. 232). The community has continued to document our existence in publications and projects such as *Tits and Sass* (<https://titsandsass.com/>) and *On Our Backs* (Blush Productions), and in direct responses to the anti-sex feminists of the sex wars, particularly the article by Jo Ann and Sue (1972) and, in the Australian context, the art collective *Debby Doesn't Do It For Free* (Surtees, 2015).

Aside from the memoirs we wrote for ourselves, lesbian sex workers have been scandalously portrayed in more mainstream contexts, such as throughout the media portrayal of the case of the late Aileen Wuornos. The notorious murder case catapulted lesbian love between sex workers into the public consciousness in her trial which sparked a media circus. Basilio (1996) uses art pieces to note that:

Representations of Wuornos in print and television media are typical of images of pathologized lesbians that emerged in the nineteenth century, and intersect with gendered and classed terms to reveal deep-seated anxieties about attempts to redefine social and legal categories. (p. 56)

Outside of the “true crime” genre, the notorious 2000s television series, *The L Word* (Chaiken, 2004-2009)(which can be understood as a lesbian version of *Sex and the City*, contained a number of references to lesbians working in the sex industry. In season one, butch heartbreaker Shane reveals a seedy past in which she disguised herself as a twink (a skinny, boyish gay man) in order to turn tricks on the streets and support her drug habit (Chaiken & Minahan, 2004. Later in the same season, Jenny, who is haunted by flashbacks of a childhood sexual assault, performs in heterosexual strip shows in an effort to reclaim her sexual power- something that is unfavourably judged by her lesbian friends (Chaiken, I & Curran, J. 2005). Even though these depictions represented sex work as inexplicably tied to homelessness, trauma, and drug addiction, as a young lesbian sex worker, I clung to them as evidence that *we existed* due to *The L Word’s* critical position in my understanding of lesbian culture.

Stardust sums up this disconnection between the academia and the outside world, stating that:

the university texts I had read up until that point were dominated by second-wave feminism and so I was struggling with my own internalised stigma. Then I read Jill Nagle’s *Whores and Other Feminists* (1997) and realised that we had our own sex worker feminism with its own histories, values and traditions. It totally changed my life. (Stardust, 2020, p. 14)

Locating myself amongst the rich history of sex work is important. As Nestle stated in 1987, “Whores, like queers, are society’s dirty joke; to even suggest that they have a history, not as a map of pathology but as a record of a people, is to challenge sacrosanct boundaries” (p. 232).

Wilson argued, in the context of Michelle Tea’s work, that there is a “feminist tradition of memoir writing to form social and political community” (L. E. Wilson, 2019, p. 26) which, prior to this thesis, has made up the bulk of evidence that lesbian and queer women have participated in sex work, the lineage that Eades (2017) speaks of. Documenting the deviance of our communities, and the queer temporality in which they exist, becomes a political act in itself (L. E. Wilson, 2019), and I seek to push past the boundary of memoirs to let my participants’ voices be heard in the academy.

Within the gestation period of this thesis, queer sex workers *have* begun to claim their space in the literature. Books like *Queer Sex Work* (Laing et al., 2015) tell stories that almost answer my research question but stop short. Although the writers within explore the experience of lesbian identifying women sex workers (in particular, Stardust, 2015) and the Australian queer context for sex workers (Cole et al., 2015) a gap persists in thoroughly analysing the identity practices that lesbian sex workers engage in to successfully navigate being at the intersection of these two

communities. Chapter Two will more thoroughly position my work next to that of the peer writers whose work is located within *Queer Sex Work* (Laing et al., 2015).

Where was the world?

Now that we have established the ways in which our experiences were both present and absent from the literature, I move on to situate this work within the contemporary landscape. Firstly, in late 2017, the so-called marriage equality bill was finally passed into law in Australia. For the first time same-sex couples could legally wed, and transgender people no longer needed to divorce their current spouses to legally transition their gender (Reardon, 2022). Juxtaposed between feelings of victory, progress and equality, this campaign had significant negative impacts on the mental health of queer Australians (Casey et al., 2021) and, of course, failed to bring with it outright “equality” for queer people living in Australia (Baird, 2018; Gerber et al., 2021). Alongside the proliferation of Australian same-sex weddings in 2018, in the United States of America, a bill that attempts to censor online content was being passed. This bill, colloquially known as SESTA/FOSTA, was purportedly introduced to disrupt human trafficking, however, would go on to have a significant effect on sex workers globally due to its ability to shut down webpages used to advertise sexual services (Musto et al., 2021; Tichenor, 2020). The effects of SESTA/FOSTA on Australian workers were only just emerging through the literature (Musto et al., 2021; Toone, 2018) when the global COVID-19 pandemic hit midway through this project, the effects of which will be touched on in the concluding chapter. Despite calls for the broader LGBTIQ communities to refocus their political energies post marriage equality (Toone, 2018), and incredibly resilient and enthusiastic campaigning by sex worker organisations and their allies (Diamond, 2020), sex workers in South Australia remain largely criminalised.

Of course, alongside these large-scale political happenings, sex workers continued to endure an atmosphere in which whorephobia is commonplace and unremarkable. Television shows and other popular media are rife with the trope of the “dead hooker” (Horn, 2022), as documented by website *TV Tropes* which gives examples across the spectrum of genres including popular movies such as *Boogie Nights*, *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* and *Natural Born Killers* (TV Tropes, n.d.). In contemporary western society where Black-face, fat jokes, and slurs against people with disabilities are deemed unacceptable by most mainstream comedy, sex workers are one of the final frontiers of acceptable fodder along with gags about the discovery of the deceptive transgender woman (J. R. Ryan, 2009). The trope, also known more politely as the “disposable sex worker”, continues to appear even in more quasi-feminist or “woke” films, such as Netflix’s *Brazen*

(Horn, 2022) or the recent movie *Promising Young Woman* (Fennel, 2020) which aims to shed a light on the impact of sexual abuse on women. *Promising Young Woman* (2020) opts to turn the lead character into a stripper who is then brutally killed. Previously the star of the movie with a complex backstory, as soon as she is posing as a stripper, no one refers to her by name, instead labelling her “the stripper”. In this way, she becomes an object rather than human, a prime example of the dead hooker/disposable sex worker. Dead hookers are often a side note, quick laugh, or an inconvenience temporarily disrupting a scene for the more important protagonists. Of course, this parable has serious impacts for the way society relates to sex workers (Johnstone, 2007) and, as art imitating life, holds a mirror up to the way that violence against sex workers is conceptualised in wider society.

This stigma is reinforced by public health campaigns such as the marketing firm, Venables, Bell & Partners’ (2008) advertisement, for the *Montana Meth* project, which shows an image of a family photo of a young girl paired with the text, “Before meth I had a daughter. Now I have a prostitute”. The popular video game *Grand Theft Auto III* (Rockstar Games 2001) becomes another shocking example of media relying on dead sex workers for effect in that it involves gamers committing crimes, including butchering “prostitutes” with an axe for points.

Given all of the above, sex workers and civilians alike cannot escape whorephobia which is then flamed by feminist critiques of sexualised culture, such as Ariel Levy’s *Female Chauvinist Pigs* which positions sex workers and, in particular, those who work in the porn industry, as complicit in the patriarchal project of dehumanising women (Levy, 2005). Indeed, for myself, it took a lot of internal work, buoyed by the positive (or, at least, neutral) portrayals in works such as *Stone Butch Blues* (Feinberg, 2003), to shake off my own internalised whorephobia. Despite the plethora of whorephobia in contemporary society, Smith and Mac (2018) eloquently remind us that sex work will continue to exist:

Sex workers are everywhere. We are your neighbours. We brush past you on the street. Our kids go to the same schools as yours....Although we are everywhere, most people know little about the reality of our lives. Sex workers are subject to a lot of curiosity and discussion in popular culture, journalism, and policy. When we are visible as workers – on the street, in signposted brothels, in digital spaces – our presence provokes disquiet. We are increasingly visible as workers in political spaces, and here too our presence provokes disquiet. Many people want to stop us from selling sex, or fix the world so we don’t need to, or just ensure they don’t have to look at us. But we are notoriously hard to get rid of, at least through criminal law. (M. Smith & Mac, 2018, pp. 1–2)

Theoretical context; is this a social work PhD?

Having established my purpose for engaging in a PhD about lesbian and queer sex workers, and setting the scene of the contemporary landscape for such communities, I will now situate this work within an academic context and explain a number of choices I make throughout the thesis. At times during this project, I toyed with the idea of developing it into an autoethnography (Mesner, 2016), inspired by the work of Elizabeth Smith who used photo-elicitation in her PhD project exploring the lives of Victorian sex workers (E. Smith, 2012), and then layered this with her own autoethnography to produce a reflexive article about her experience (E. Smith, 2015). Despite this work not eventuating as an autoethnography, I am heavily influenced by Letherby's (2014) writing about the importance of the self in a research project. It is because of this that I choose to include my first-person voice in sections of the thesis. My own identity as a queer woman who has engaged in the sex industry must be explicitly clear. As Letherby (2014) states, using first-person voice deliberately centres participant narratives as the experts in their own experience. Using first person and attaching myself with the participants (the use of "we" rather than "they") (p. 46) when discussing lesbian sex workers, is a deliberate and cautious attempt in the legacy of writers such as Crowder in her justification of the same. Crowder sees her use of "we" as a core part of producing feminist discourse. She states, "For me to say 'lesbians/they' is... a lie, but it is also a lie to use 'we', since no one can speak for all lesbians" (Crowder, 1998, p. 48). I agree with Crowder's stance that some stylistic awkwardness is a fair price to situate myself within the research.

In pondering whether this is a social work PhD, I have reflected on Stardust's (2020) assertion that the field of social work is rife with sex workers. In a discipline whose purpose is to challenge structural inequality and advocate for deviants, this makes a lot of sense, however, Stardust finds that:

Many sex workers study social work; it is a natural extension of their skills as listeners and counsellors. But that subject is notorious for having saviours and rescuers who only see sex workers as victims and where sex work is seen as a 'risk factor'. It makes it difficult for sex workers to participate and engage in class discussions where their entire lived experience is dismissed. I know so many who have dropped out. My advice has largely been to find allies among the staff and students, to find out who would be there for you and stand up for you, and to create a bubble of support around you in order to survive in the institution. (Stardust, 2020, p. 23).

Whilst sexuality is often neglected in social work literature, I argue that sexuality and identity, particularly of the subjects often "othered" or positioned as deviant in contemporary society, should indeed be a concern to the discipline of social work.

Significance and scope

There is a clear gap in academic literature about the identity and community experiences of lesbian and queer women who also identify as sex workers, as will be discussed in Chapter Two. This is significant when we consider estimations of non-heterosexual populations to be over three per cent of the Australian population (T. Wilson et al., 2020) and we know that a hard to define, yet significant, number of women participate in the sex industry across their lifespan. Importantly, the significance of this study to participants was reflected in their accounts. Participants described shock, joy, and pride that their lives were finally to be represented in the literature (discussed further in Chapter Four). As a social worker and a feminist, I resonate with the words of Tilly Lawless (2021) who illustrates the importance of seeing ourselves represented in text. Lawless writes of wanting to know:

how full service sex workers in the past lived. Not re-imaginings, but directly from them... Want to know if they had little lesbian affairs amongst each other?... If the brothel madam talked them into seeing one last client at the end of a long shift, assuring them that he wouldn't last long, & they wearily got undressed again to make that little bit more, because after all it is work? Want to know if they too walked home in the early hours of the morning, when the light was a sick glow - did they race to beat the full sun glare, were they overly aware of the money on them & hoped they wouldn't be raped as all women hope when they are walking streets alone? (p. X)

Killen (2017) describes the significance of representation because of “social isolation and historical exclusion” (p. 59). Of queer femmes, in particular, Killen states:

Queer women's voices are often lost in historical accounts, especially when it comes to stories that engage with our day-to-day, embodied experiences. This absence is representative of a larger dismissal of women's lives, but also of a tendency to medicalise queer bodies in a way that sterilises, isolates and negates the meaningfulness of the mundane and every day. For queer women, involvement in the kinds of public life that usually attract historical attention has always been tainted with secrecy and intimacy. That is, our mundane moments are often political and our political moments are often necessarily private... (Killen, 2017, p. 59)

This introduction identifies my purpose in undertaking this study and has situated it within the landscape facing lesbian and queer sex working women in contemporary Australia. I have argued that the thesis is indeed a social work PhD, and occupies a significant gap in the literature by asking how lesbian and queer sex workers experience community and identity.

Thesis overview

In Chapter Two, I situate this study within a history of feminist enquiry into sex work and illustrate the ongoing conflicts in this space. I argue that sex work can be better understood by understanding the literature on “dirty work”, and then specifically link this to the stigma of sex

work. I move on to unpack the argument that all sex work is queer, and then briefly touch on research that looks at queer and lesbian identities intersecting with other vocations. I outline existing work that identifies an intersection between sex work and a queer experience, and then pay homage to the rise of peer written literature from both academic works and also grey literature.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology and methods for this study. I argue for the importance of peer-led research and discuss my attachment to queer theory before moving on to situate the work in a Bourdesian framework. In particular, Bourdieu's (1972/1977) theory of practice and feel for the game is outlined here. I discuss the usefulness of theories of capital before examining the ethical implications of this project. I end the third chapter by outlining the methods of data collection and analysis.

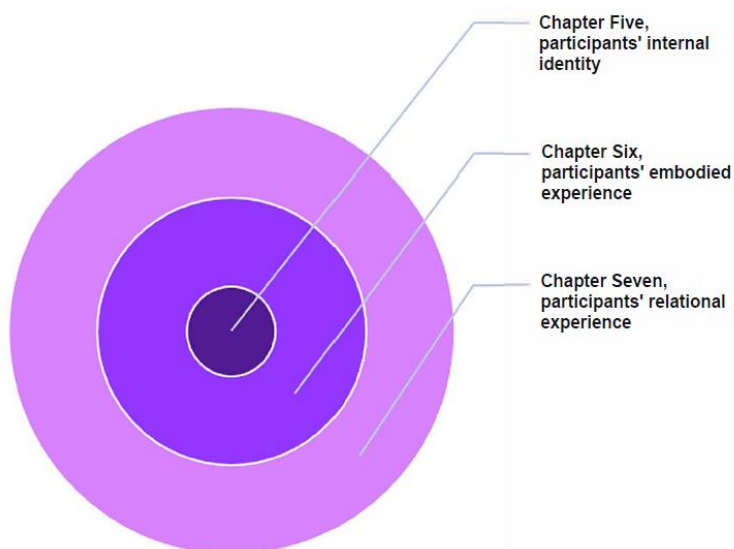
In Chapter Four, I present the findings of this project. First, I provide capsule biographies for all twenty participants. I then propose that, in order to effectively use Bourdieu's Theory of Practice to adequately understand the lives of participants, I must introduce a new form of capital, as writers before me have done. I argue that whore capital exists for my participants in two separate but connected forms, namely, intra industry whore capital (IIWC) and community whore capital (CWC). The first, as its name suggests, exists within the sex work industry enabling participants to successfully navigate the field of sex work despite of, or because of, their personal sexual identities. I show the way that this capital evolves over time and presents itself in skilled workers who have honed their craft in order to achieve financial gain. The second form of whore capital, CWC, is a relatively new phenomenon existing only within contemporary woke queer leftist cultures where participants' status as sex workers (once laced with stigma and "whore taint") now gives them an essence of street cred.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven present the data collected in my study, arranged into themes to answer the research question. Identity and community are at the centre of this study that focuses on the experiences of lesbian and queer women who participant in the commercial sex industry. The three chapters are separated by overarching themes; the first being identity work broadly, the second focusing on embodied experiences, and the third exploring how community intersects with identity. These three themes are, of course, inextricably linked together, interdependent, and connected, but for the purposes of this thesis, I have attempted to separate them out in the most logical way possible. Identity work does not occur in a vacuum; it is necessarily experienced

through the body (embodied) and impacted by the communities and social groups that the individual is situated within. I argue that, for lesbian and queer sex workers, the communities in which they exist have an amplified impact on their experiences of identity because of the non-normative nature of these communities. The three key themes are not presented in a particular order of importance but instead in a sort of concentric way; from participant, to participant in their body, to participant in their body interacting with others. I use the data presented within Chapters Five, Six, and Seven to support my argument as outlined in Chapter Four; that using Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1972/1977), I have identified two distinct forms of whore capital to better understand the way that queer and lesbian sex workers negotiate both their own identities, and the multiple communities in which they exist.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. As well as providing an overall synthesis of the entire thesis, it also addresses limitations of the study, particularly focusing on the rapid changes to the sex industry, sexuality-based communities, and, indeed, the world itself, propelled by the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic during the journey of my PhD candidature in which this thesis came into being. Chapter Eight closes the thesis by proposing possibilities for future study.

Figure 1
Relationality of chapter structure



CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research question

This research seeks to better understand an under-researched population; namely, women who labour providing sexual services to a male audience, but who describe their sexual identity as lesbian or queer. The research uses qualitative methods to understand how these women experience their identities, in conjunction with the communities to which they belong, and how they understand their own sexuality. Specifically, it asks: **How do lesbian and queer sex workers in contemporary Australia negotiate their identities and communities as both lesbians/queer, and as women who perform heterosexual sexualities?**

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to argue two main points: firstly, the existence of lesbian and queer sex workers is well documented in both academic and popular literature; secondly, whilst the literature has thoroughly explored lesbian identity practices, *and* the impact of sex work on an individual's identity, the impact of identifying *both* as a lesbian or queer woman and identifying as a sex worker is yet to be addressed in the literature. Feminist discourse has shaped social scientific research over the last few decades, for better or for worse (Koken, 2010). Much of the contemporary, empirical research on sex work is centred on health, policy and policing, to present the entirety of this field of literature within this review is outside of the scope of this thesis¹. The majority of qualitative literature exploring identity practices of non-straight sex working women has occurred in the North American context or is a number of decades old. The research underpinning this thesis is concerned with the experiences of identity and communities for sex

¹ The literature on sex work is vast and varied and it would be remiss to claim that it is represented here in its entirety. For a contemporary, peer written source on the current global state of the sex workers rights movement, see Mac and Smith (2018). For current legislation and empirical research internationally, see Vanwesenbeeck (2017), and in the Australian context, B. Sullivan (2010). For discussion of sex work clients, see Frank (2003) and Sanders (2013). Current global politics sees sex workers facing extreme censorship, largely in line with the US governments SESTA-FOSTA reform. For the impact on the most recent assault on sex workers rights, agency, and safety, see Peterson et al. (2019) and Tichenor (2020). For an understanding of current policing, Scoular, Pitcher, Sanders, Campbell, and Cunningham provide a summary of UK laws and their "pernicious" effect in the modern, technology focussed sex trade (Scoular et al., 2019), "across the ditch" the decriminalisation is discussed by Armstrong (2017), while Fawkes (2014), Stardust (2014) and Sanders et al. (2014) contribute to the Australian context. More locally, Baratosy and Wendt (2017) address the South Australian setting.

working queer women in contemporary Australia, a distinctly different context than what has been covered by existing literature.

While the population size of sex workers is difficult to quantify due to the clandestine and criminalised nature of the work, in 2014, the UN estimated that there were 20,500 people providing sexual services within Australia (UN data, 2014). It is also hard to quantify how many people identify as lesbians or queer women in Australia, as these data are not collected in the national census. However, common estimates of gender and sexually diverse people are currently around 3.5% of the general population (T. Wilson et al., 2020). It becomes impossible, then, to estimate the number of female sex workers in Australia who identify as queer or lesbian but, as this chapter will argue, despite the two identities seemingly contradicting one another, the existence of lesbian sex workers is well documented in both academic and popular literature (Kooy, 1998; A. Thomas, 2006; Pilcher, 2012) with some authors even claiming that “lesbian and bisexual women are highly overrepresented in the sex industry” (Lyons et al., 2014, p. 1092).

Sex workers’ experiences of identity have increasingly become the focus of research over the last few decades (Read, 2014; Selmi, 2012; Cox et al., 2013; Doezema, 2013) as researchers seek to de-pathologise the sex worker (Olasik, 2018). This interest has occurred as we further understand the impact of both our vocation (Christiansen, 1999) and dominant gender discourse on our personal identity construction. Sex workers’ vocation-based identities may be more significant than other industry or role specific identities, due to the stigma and criminalised nature of their work (Read, 2014). As sexuality is experienced and performed in all facets of a person’s daily life (Dunk-West, 2012), workplace identity management practices that are undertaken across industries include the integration of an individual’s sexual identity. This becomes particularly significant for workers who have non-normative (non-heterosexual) sexual identities (C. Clarke, et al., 2009). I argue that the intersection of the impact of both a lesbian sexual identity and sex work identity, however, is yet to be fully unpacked within the social science literature, as Lyons et al. (2019) note, research on queer women sex workers is “sparse”.

The feminist sex wars of the 1980s saw sex positive feminists clash with second wave feminists, and sex workers became a site of conflict between these two opposing views (Toone, 2018). During this era of feminist history, women’s rights activists accused sex workers of being agency-less victims of the patriarchy. The impact of this paternalistic rhetoric on the wellbeing of sex workers is well documented (see M. Smith & Mac, 2018, pp. 9–12). Sex workers’ bodies continue

to be battlegrounds for feminist debate into contemporary times. This conflict has shaped modern discourse about sex workers and trafficking is readily conflated with sex work in academic discourse (Weitzer, 2007). The decriminalisation model, despite being the most successful model for promoting the health and safety of workers (Aroney & Crofts, 2019) is deemed by some to be pandering to the desire of the “pimp lobby” (Dunt, 2015). Further, lesbian identities continue to be boundary-policed by other lesbian women (Blair & Hoskin, 2015; Earles, 2019; Levitt et al., 2003). A complex space exists for lesbian sex workers due to these two interlocking issues.

The campaign for sex worker rights, particularly in the USA and Australia, has been pioneered by queer and lesbian women (Toone, 2018). Themes of sex work are commonplace in popular lesbian and queer media and literature, however, there remains a lack of academic literature that explores how lesbian-identifying sex workers manage their sexual identities in conflict with their workplace performance of heterosexuality/hetero-sex. Particularly in the Australian contemporary space, the identity experiences of this population are missing. Sex work scholar Barton identified herself as a butch lesbian and illustrated the landscape of literature about lesbian identities in the sex industry back in 2001, noting that “almost every pro-sex activist and scholar lining my desk shelves identifies herself as lesbian or bisexual. While the number of lesbian and bisexual women studying, analyzing, and commenting on sex workers is significant, the social science examining the sexual identities of sex workers is virtually non-existent” (Barton, 2001, pp. 5–6).

While Barton’s claims are now twenty years old, they stand somewhat salient; there has not been a steep increase in literature unpacking a “tension” (Barton, 2001, p. 5) between lesbian sexuality and performance of heterosexual desire in the past two decades and certainly this gap still exists in the contemporary Australian context.

Queer women and lesbian sexual identities

Buxton writes that “the definition of ‘lesbian’ can be fluid and complex, and often depends on the era of lesbian history that is being discussed” (2020, p. 60). The history of academic thought on non-heterosexual sexual acts, attractions, and identities has been described by many, for example, Weeks and Holland’s (1996) edited work titled *Sexual Cultures*. A full description of this progression of thought is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, it is useful to position this work within a brief timeline of contemporary understandings – both academic and community. As mentioned above, recent studies have estimated the sexual minority population in Australia to be

around 3.5% of the total population (T. Wilson et al., 2020), although the scholars acknowledge significant issues with the available data used to make these claims.

Understandings of (queer) sexuality

Since the mid nineteenth century, the natural sciences have pursued the search for a biological essentialist “cause” of (male) homosexuality (Rose, 1996). This hunt was born of a desire to defend the naturalness of a homosexual individual and acts following prior understandings of sodomy as deviant, unnatural, and sinful. During this time, Kinsey and his team proposed a scale of sexual attraction which positioned homosexuality to be as natural as heterosexuality for both women and men (Kinsey et al., 1953). Psychoanalysts revisited earlier work by Freud which positioned sexuality as innate and instinctual, yet informed by the social (Freud, 1905/1953). Fifty years later, the search for a gay gene continues in the hard sciences, in direct conflict with social constructionists’ understandings of sexuality. Whilst women were largely left out of this line of inquiry historically, more modern scientists have included lesbian and bisexual women in their search (LeVay, 2016). The neuroscientist LeVay states that:

Sexual orientation is an aspect of gender that emerges from the prenatal sexual differentiation of the brain. Whether a person ends up gay, straight, or bisexual depends in large part on how this process of biological differentiation goes forward, the lead actors being genes, sex hormones, and the brain systems that they influence. (LeVay, 2016)

This widely held belief of biologically determined sexuality has influenced the progression of gay rights and is made obvious in pop culture references such as Lady Gaga’s anthem of biological essentialism, *Born This Way* (Cárdenas, 2012). Other scholars have looked to birth order (Blanchard, 2018) and epigenetics (Gavrilets et al., 2018) for answers, and whilst these lines of scholarship have been labelled “neurosexist” (Fine, 2014, p. 915), they are pervasive in societies’ understanding of gender.

Concurrently, sociological scholars have moved away from biological essentialist understandings to propose that sexuality, and even gender, are socially constructed and can only be understood as social (Goffman, 2009; Jenness, 1992; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Beginning a feminist rejection of essentialist notions of gender, de Beauvoir (1949/1988) pronounced in the mid 20th century that “one is not born a woman, one becomes one” (p. 267). Whilst de Beauvoir’s work has been furiously critiqued over the last fifty or so years (Groscholz, 2004), it remains an important starting place for constructionist understandings (Marcus, 2020). Adrienne Rich (1980) then explained the way that heterosexuality becomes compulsory, and although Rich herself has since felt this piece

was “flawed, outdated” (Rich, 2004, p. 9), she argues that its continued popularity points to the way that society’s influence over individuals’ sexuality endures in modern times. In the early 1990s, Butler (1990) argued that we learn about the gender performance that is expected of us early in life through a process of socialisation (we are socialised as either male or female), and we perform and reperform these patterned behaviours, rarely questioning them. Rather than a true self simply existing, we create this “self” through the repeated performance. The performativity of gender norms is necessary as gender is a regulatory social system (Butler, 1990). Wittig extended this line of thinking in 1992 when she proclaimed that “lesbians are not women” (p. 12) or, in other words, the lesbian exists outside of the gendered heterosexual performance therefore she is “other than” woman.

This thesis follows the tradition of social constructionists who theorise that sexuality is socially constructed or, in other words, “that sexual relations always occur within a nexus of wider social relations” (Stevi Jackson & Scott, 2010, p. 141). The social constructionist and queer theory methodology of this thesis will be detailed further in Chapter Three, however, it is worth noting here Jackson and Scott’s (2010) call for embodiment and the body to remain present in theories of sexuality.

Sexuality is self-evidently embodied: ‘having sex’ obviously entails socially located bodies in interaction. Yet there is still surprisingly little sociological work on the bodily aspects of sexuality. Calls continue to be made for greater attention to be given to the lived, fleshy experience of embodiment, but these are more easily made than answered (see Morgan and Scott 1993). Within sociology on the one hand we have theories of the body and of the social construction of sexuality, which say little about embodied sexual practices, and on the other we have statistical data on who does what with whom and how often, but which tell us nothing about the processes involved. While some qualitative research attends to embodied experience and practice, elsewhere, amid ever more abstract theorizations of the body, embodied social actors disappear altogether. (Stevi Jackson & Scott, 2010, p. 140)

It is important to also understand the alternative theories and beliefs that are widely held and thus impact on the understandings of contemporary lesbian and queer women themselves; “we cannot understand sexual identity development apart from an understanding of history” (Hammack & Cohler, 2009, p. 12). Having situated this work within social constructionist thinking on sexuality, and that within predominant theories of sexuality as a whole, I argue that lesbian identity development has been thoroughly explored in the literature. I now provide a brief overview of contemporary thought about lesbian identity practices to argue that because lesbian identity development is linked to practices of sexuality, it may be troubled by the intersecting identity of *sex worker*.

Lesbian identity development

Following on from the social constructionist understanding of sexuality, we can understand lesbian identity to mean a continuum of things (Rich, 1980). Lesbianism is an inherently sexualised identity which can involve group identity between an individual and other lesbians; a personal decision to align ones experience with the label of lesbian as a descriptor; and being understood as lesbian by society. As Payne states:

Lesbian desire is culturally constructed as highly sexual, perverse, predatory and masculine. It is at odds with society's conceptions of moral worth and the classed expectations for the idealized American girl. (E. Payne, 2015, p. 235)

In recent decades, many scholars have proposed models of lesbian identity development (Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Faderman, 1985; Fassinger & Morrow, 1995; Sophie, 1986) which recognise that sexual identity development for lesbian women is "an important, acknowledged, integrated part of the self" (Fassinger, 1995, p. 153). More recently, focus has shifted to understanding changes in an individual's sexual identity over the lifespan, finding that sexual identity development "continues after the adoption of a gay/lesbian identity" (Rosario et al., 2006, p.46). And further, an editorial by Hagai and Seymour in the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* asked whether lesbian identity is obsolete (Hagai & Seymour, 2022) finding that lesbian identity is "relevant and important to women today, and that lesbian political culture is critical in facing global crisis" (Hagai & Seymour, 2022, p. 8) and presenting work from a range of authors who explore trans, non- white, and post-colonial perspectives. Within the Australian context, scholarship on lesbian identity practices continue. Some examples come from Gorman-Murray (2008) who finds that domestic material (homemaking practices) is a tool for identity management, and Willis (2012) whose young participants used the term "lesbian" for themselves to denote a disruption of relationships with men. Other scholars have turned away from using the identity label of "lesbian" in their research, and instead have turned their focus towards the "queer femme", which McCann and Killen illustrate as:

The femme attachment to feminine aesthetics has complicated their relationship to LGBTIQ communities and to the politics of queer identity. In contrast to lesbians who eschew normative femininity, and are thereby visible as queer and labelled as 'mannish', femmes often continue to embody the femininity expected of them as women. This superficially normative femininity has produced tensions in relation to not only femme belonging in queer communities but also in terms of who can belong in the category 'femme'. (McCann & Killen, 2019, p. 135)

The impact of shifting meanings and identity category labels on recruitment in this study is discussed further in Chapter Three.

When understanding the cultural impact of sexuality-based communities, we can look back to Murray (1979) who found similarities in the late twentieth century between modern, Western, industrial societies and homosexuality based groups, in that they had acquired much of the institutional structure of an ethnic group. Much more recently, Logan (2013) similarly argued that, for lesbians in particular, “results point to the importance of sexuality as an organizing element of social life” (p. 1494). At the beginning of this decade, an oral history piece from Auckland (a city comparable to Adelaide, where this study was undertaken) remarked upon the factors that encouraged the formation of a lesbian community. Buxton notes that:

During the fifty years or so following Stonewall, the lesbian community in Auckland was initially formed around political activism as well as social interaction. Once established, it became by default the overarching entity representing women with non-heteronormative sexual and gender identities. (Buxton, 2020, p. 61)

Lesbian and Queer identities in the workplace

Despite recent anti-discrimination laws and other cultural shifts intended to combat gender differences in the workplace, gendered norms still impact the lives of women working in Australia – particularly in service industries (Easteal et al., 2018; Riach & Wilson, 2014). These norms include formal and informal (explicit and implicit) expectations on standards of dress (Adkins, 2000) and personal grooming, and place a significant burden on working women who are expected to conform to sexualised notions of womanhood (Easteal et al., 2018). It is widely accepted that sexuality permeates every aspect of contemporary life (Dunk-West, 2012) and, further, “gender and sexuality are indelibly linked within the context of the workplace” (Tweedy, 2019, p. 192). The impact of non-heterosexual sexual identities in workplace settings has therefore emerged as an area of interest, particularly in the literature on industrial relations and of course sexuality studies. Existing in the intersection of gendered norms (most often aimed at women) and heteronormativity, are lesbian women in the workplace, or what Gedro (2006) terms a “double bind” (p. 46). This section will focus on what current literature finds about these women.

Much of the existing literature focuses on the lesbian individual’s decision to come out in her workplace. Despite minority sexuality research in the field of occupational or workplace studies existing for decades now, lesbian-specific research is still under-represented (Chung, 2003). Regardless of self-disclosure of sexual orientation, it is asserted that the lesbian’s sexual orientation impacts workplace identity (Einarsdóttir et al., 2016; Adkins, 2000). Unlike some other identity factors, such as race and physical difference, sexuality is not always visually obvious and

so decisions are made by an individual about “coming out” or disclosing their identities (although Santuzzi et al. [2014] explore concealable disabilities in their work).

Early findings in organisational literature were that workplace disclosure of sexual identity (or “coming out”) occurs more easily for lesbians in female dominated industries such as the social services (Schneider, 1986). Research from the twenty-first century, unfortunately, has similar findings. Gender presentation (normative feminine or masculine) impacts one’s experience of disclosure (Hamilton et al., 2019). Some studies have found that negotiating gay and lesbian identity disclosure or non-disclosure was a complex process informed by multiple factors (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001; Wessel, 2017), including perceived organisational climate, availability of allies, and consequences. Sadly, in 2012, Willis found that young Australians (aged 18-26) still employ practices to conceal their sexual identity in the workplace. This is pertinent to this study as many sex workers fit into this younger age category. In these contemporary times, that some authors are describing as “post-gay” given stigma relating to homosexuality seems to be in decline (Ghaziani, 2014; Lea et al., 2015; McDermott, 2011), we could assume that younger workers would be more confident to come out in the workplace. This has implications for research about sex workers who can also be assumed to be more “sexually liberated” and liberally minded, however, this may not actually be the case. Burnett (2010) discusses their research participants as being “strategically in the closet” (p. 44) due to a fear that disclosing one’s lesbianism would put their employment at risk: “They framed this as a way of managing their work environment, protecting their lesbian selves, and resisting unsuitable labels and stereotypes from significant others in the work landscape” (Burnett, 2010, p. 48).

Fielden and Jepson (2018) found that coming out positively affected career progression but the decision to come out is affected by legislation, perceived lesbophobia in the workplace, and geographical location. Class becomes a factor in negotiating a lesbian identity in the workplace, with working class women under more pressure to perform heterosexuality within their work and, therefore, less likely to disclose their lesbian identity (McDermott, 2006). Hamilton et al. recognise that identities covered under the LGBTIQ banner are not a monolith, and gender differences impact these experiences. They find that women, in particular, are required to foster more personal relationships in the workplace, and this impacts lesbians’ choice (or lack thereof) about disclosing sexual identity (K. Hamilton et al., 2019).

Given that the research question is asking about experiences of identity and community for lesbian and queer sex workers, two findings, in particular, have implications for this study. Van Laer (2018) finds that co-workers are not passive audiences to queer workers in their journey of coming out, but instead play an active role in requiring their team members to occupy a “clear sexual identity” (p. 253), and Williamson et al. (2017) find that the impact of workplace disclosure was not only felt by the worker, but by their same-sex partner, too. Do these findings translate to workplaces in the sex industry? Or does the addition of the sex worker identity shift experiences for these workers? As this literature shows, disclosure of sexuality is a measured choice for some, but for others whose gender expression transgresses the expected, there is less choice in disclosure. Particularly for non-normative sexualities, gender and sexuality are inexplicitly linked and, as Van Leuven (1998) states, “sexualization... [is] an achievement... sexuality, like gender, must be done” (p. 75). When unpacking the experiences of workers in the sex industry, where the gendered performance of sexuality becomes an inherent part of the job, what is the impact of non-normative gender and sexuality identities?

Also relevant is a study published in 2019 by Amy Tweedy whose ethnographic research focused on the experiences of lesbian women working at gas stations in North America. Tweedy (2019) found heterosexist understandings of the work of physical labour created an expectation for her participants to engage in significant emotional labour during interactions with customers. Participants were able to disrupt and “play” with these expectations whilst constantly assessing the safety of doing so. Most of Tweedy’s participants engaged in visual markers of their sexuality which could easily be read by other queer women, and yet “many customers do not even entertain the possibility that the laboring body is anything but heterosexual” (p. 187). Tweedy also found that some participants disclosed their sexuality to customers in an effort to stave off unwanted sexual attention. Tweedy’s (2019) study raises questions for the present study; do sex workers engage in similar strategic disclosures of lesbianism? There is a significant difference between the masculine field of the gas station and the overtly feminine realm of the strip club or brothel – how does this setting, or “field”, affect the strategies on offer to lesbians within the workplace? Research has emerged showing slight difference in co-workers’ perception of workplace romances between gay and lesbian co-workers compared to heterosexual workplace pairings (Horan & Chory, 2013), finding that co-workers perceive gay and lesbian pairings with more generosity, as long as they don’t involve workers in management, and slightly less trust in

lesbian co-workers dating managers than in gay male co-workers dating managers. Whether this research can be translated to a sex work workplace is yet to be understood.

From international aid workers (Rengers et al., 2019) to physical education teachers (Woods & Harbeck, 1992), from executives (Heintz, 2012) to police (Giwa et al., 2022), a wide range of careers have been studied in the context of the lesbian experience, and much is known about the lesbian in the workplace. However, research on the lesbian experience within an Australian work context remains relatively non-existent (Burnett, 2010). The few studies particularly addressing lesbian experiences in the sex industry are addressed further along in this chapter.

Sites of conflict

Sex workers exist in a contemporary landscape in which exclusionary feminists still police sexual identity boundaries. This branch of feminism is sometimes referred to as SWERF (sex worker exclusionary radical feminism), is usually aligned with TERF (trans exclusionary radical feminism), and follows a biological essentialist framework to understand gender and oppression (Earles, 2019). Lesbian academics, like Andrea Dworkin (1993), Sheila Jeffreys (2018), and Julie Bindel (2017), take a clear anti-sex work (and anti-sex worker) stance and the movement is enjoying a recent revival in Australia, demonstrated by the *World's Oldest Oppression Conference* in Melbourne in 2016 (Barron, 2020). Radical lesbian feminists argue that voluntary sex workers are tools of the patriarchy and responsible for the trafficking of other women (Bindel, 2017; M. L. Sullivan, 2007). These academics and activists refute the agency of people working voluntarily in the sex industry (Moran & Farley, 2019) and point to the use of separate identity markers such as false names, to concur that sex workers' identities must be troubled (Bindel, 2017). SWERFs separate themselves from queer liberationists and instead unite with conservative feminist movements and religious organisations to further the narrative of inherent exploitation. This very public rhetoric potentially has a significant impact in internal experiences of sexual identity, as well as communal experience of identity for women who work in the sex industry. It has been noted that community stigma can lead to "negativity, isolation and passivity" (Sanders, 2017, p. 736), however as Sanders notes, academics are in a key position to push back against this and have significant impact on sex worker wellbeing in the process (Sanders, 2018). There is a sex positive academic push to see trafficking as separate from sex work, however, this view can sometimes stigmatise the worker in low and middle income countries in the same way it seeks to avoid stigmatising the Western woman; it can be just as problematic and incorrect to assume that sex

workers in the Eastern world, particularly Southeast Asia, are victims with no agency or autonomy. As Agustín (2007) points out in *Sex at the Margins*, Western feminists' have an attachment to the non-Western prostitute as a wounded victim). Trafficking, and the sex work that occurs in these places, is beyond the scope of this thesis, but for further reading, see Bettio et al. (2017) and Patterson (2015). As Smith and Mac note:

Prostitution is heavy with meaning and brings up deeply felt emotions. This is especially the case for people who have not sold sex, and who think of it in symbolic terms. The idea of prostitution serves as a lightning rod for questions about work, masculinity, class, bodies; about archetypal villainy and punishment; about who 'deserves' what; about what it means to live in a community; and about what it means to push some people outside that community's boundaries. Attitudes towards prostitution have always been strongly tied to questions of race, borders, migration, and national identity in ways which are sometimes overt but often hidden. Sex work is the vault in which society stores some of its keenest fears and anxieties. (M. Smith & Mac, 2018, p. 2)

It is worth noting here the ways in which the agency of sex workers is drawn upon in particular contexts, whose narratives are privileged in these sites of conflict, and to what end. This stigma is perpetuated in mainstream media as sex workers become the butt of regular jokes – sex workers are less than human in many instances and the “dead hooker” (Johnstone, 2007) joke is alarmingly common across film, television, and comedy, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Even as well-respected mainstream international organisations such as Amnesty International declare their stance on sex work being work, and decriminalisation being the best way forward (Amnesty International, 2015), the pushback this provokes can be alarmingly popular. The campaign against Amnesty's (2015) declaration, led by a group of celebrities who joined with “feminist” organisations and religious groups, relied on arguments that link sex work to trafficking and rape. Depicted as a fight for all women's rights, despite being led by non-sex working, mostly white women, this situation can be compared to the much earlier “sex wars” because of the binary nature of “evidence” presented (Phipps, 2017) and the complete discount of the evidence-based data collected through global consultation that led to Amnesty's decision (Phipps, 2017).

An understanding of the work of sex work

This section will present a brief overview of the historical lenses that have dominated study of sex work, and arrived at the conclusion that sex work is work and must be considered as such. With this argument established, the experience of workplace identity for sex workers, can be compared to other forms of stigmatised work. A gendered approach to understanding work stigma and the sexualisation of women's roles contributes to this section and, therefore, can establish

professional identity work as an important factor in the lives of the participants this study seeks to analyse.

Historically, academic writing about “prostitution” and the “prostitute” emerged from the disciplines of criminology, public health, and psychoanalytical research (for example, H. L. Miller, 2000; J. Miller, 2010; Wolfenden & Menninger, 1963; Storr, 1964). Therefore, given the disciplines producing the majority of the discourse, the focus of this early writing centred on disease control, moral and religious concerns, and protecting the general public, and, indeed, potential sex buyers (men) from these two realms of risk. The discourse about prostitution in the early twentieth century was similar to, and often linked with, discourse about men who engaged in what is now considered homosexual activity, which was explored through the same lenses of criminality, risk to community health, and signs of mental disorder (H. L. Miller, 2000; Rubin, 1984).

The late twentieth century saw (amongst a backdrop of contention in feminist writings, as was explored in the previous section) the conversation on sex work begin to evolve into a debate about whether sex work was, in fact, a legitimate job rather than this societal evil, psychological ill, or threat to public health and social cohesion as previously debated (Weitzer, 1991). For the first time in modern history, women’s voices began to permeate academic conversations as the rise of feminism was experienced within the Western world (Messer-Davidow, 2002). In contemporary times, many scholars agree that there are a diverse range of experiences in sex work (Hardy et al., 2010) and, for some people, sex work is a “profession and a career” (A. Murphy & Venkatesh, 2006, p. 129). In particular, this new focus on the labour or “work” in sex work is supported by scholars who claim that, in actual fact, all work (and particularly that which is performed by women) is inherently a form of “sex work” due to its occurrence within patriarchal, capitalist structures (Adkins, 1995; Funari, 1997).

In the intervening years between the beginnings of feminist discourse and now, comparisons have been made about the sexual labour that is expected across industries, such as flight attending (Taylor & Tyler, 2000), hospitality (Erickson, 2004), and even architecture (Caven et al., 2012). Indeed, for Cockburn (1991), “bodies and sexuality are sold to the employer and by the employer, literally in the case of the sex industry, less totally in the case of the ‘attractive’ secretary or six foot security guard” (p. 138). Here, Cockburn (1991) is pointing to the embodiment of the worker (as a woman) being essential to the performance of a labour role. Not everyone agrees with the

conflation of all work with sex work, however; for example, West and Austrin (2002) trouble the comparison:

Prostitution (as masquerade) has become a powerful metaphor for understanding interactional work because, on the one hand, this is where 'improvisation', impression management and the presentation of self are centre stage and, on the other, it is the sex worker who epitomizes the inseparability of bodily performance from the product being sold. (p. 487)

They continue with their critique of such comparisons:

Our argument is not that embodiment is irrelevant but rather that the ways this is conceptualized and the ways in which parallels are generally drawn between prostitution and mainstream employment are incomplete. This is because the focus, in relation to both, is on identities and gender relations rather than on how these identities are produced and provoked through complex and overlapping networks. (West & Austrin, 2002, p. 487)

Regardless of whether the sexuality and gendered relations inherent in all (women's) work can be conflated with work within the sex industry, scholars have largely moved past moral debates around the legitimacy of sex work as work (Silcock, 2014), although a vocal minority of SWERFs continue this debate, as discussed. Mercifully, debates around the risk sex workers pose to community purity and the psychological deviance of individual workers have mostly disappeared from scholarly debate. As cited in the introduction, however, these arguments still flourish in popular culture, politics, and policy where morality is used to oppress and criminalise (Fawkes, 2014).

Some research does continue to track the physical health outcomes of sex workers, from assessing relatively low rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) compared to the general population in Australia (D. P. Wilson et al., 2010), to reporting discrepancies between the experiences of street workers (sometimes also referred to as survival or outdoor workers) which are characterised by high rates of sexual assaults and other disproportionately high and concerning social determinants of health, such as homelessness and intravenous drug use (Harcourt et al., 2001; A. N. Morton et al., 1999), and indoor workers who often have more agency, including those working legally (Begum et al., 2013). The focus of the more stimulating contemporary qualitative research centres around identity formation, from the aspect of professional identity (and, indeed, the identity or image of the entire industry) which will be explored herein, to sexuality-based identity and the crossovers between minority sexuality identity and sex work, as discussed towards the end of this chapter.

A dirty profession, a dirtied identity

When discussing the importance of one's profession on their identity, Christiansen (1999) states that, "occupations are key not just to being a person, but to being a particular person, and thus creating and maintaining an identity" (p. 547). Understanding identity through a social constructionist lens, Christiansen (1999) asserts that occupation, or as they explain, "goal directed activity in the context of living" (p. 553), is an important aspect of sense of self and, therefore, identity. Scholars have asserted the importance of this workplace identity for individuals across industries, for example, social work (Miehls & Moffatt, 2000), the arts (Costas & Fleming, 2009), and flight attending (Tyler & Hancock, 2001). Our occupations influence how we construct our individual and group sense of selves (Christiansen, 1999). An example of non-sex work professionals who experience struggles relating to their work identity can be found in Knights and Clarke's (2013) analysis of how insecure identities impact academics. Knights and Clarke broadly argue that the insecurity inherent in working within higher education has a profound impact on workers' sense of self and brought a lack of meaning to their workplace identities. While individuals with work identities that are outside the "norm" can experience stigma related to work identity – such as internet gamers who may be perceived as "strange and exotic" (Lee & Lin, 2011, p. 455), some work, in particular, is more highly stigmatised and has been termed "dirty work".

The concept of "dirty work" was first explored by Hughes (1962) in his consideration of Naziism in Germany. Hughes uses the example of the members of the SS, who carried out atrocities during that time, to understand the phenomena of work and workers that are so tainted by stigma and often literal dirt (or, in the German analysis, human waste), that they are deliberately pushed aside from the consciousness of individuals in wider society. Hughes (1962) demonstrates this by using discussions he had with Germans who lived at the time, who agreed that while the atrocities were unthinkable, at the same time, cited what they saw as a very real "Jewish problem" which needed to be dealt with in some way, by someone. This "Jewish problem" necessitates "dirty work" quietly carried out by unknown and largely unacknowledged dirty workers (the SS) who become "agents" of the broader society (Hughes, 1962, p. 7). Later writers have taken Hughes' ideas and linked them to both Bourdieu's (1977) habitus and field (a concept more thoroughly discussed below) and Goffman's theories of stigma and social identity (R. Simpson et al., 2016). Simpson et al. agree with Ashforth and Kreiner's (2014) assertion that all forms of dirty work are socially constructed regardless of how much literal dirt is involved. Dirty work then, can be understood as a way for society to fathom the undesirable professions (or elements within

professions) that exist, and are arguably necessary for the functioning of that society. Examples of these “tainted” workers range from rubbish collectors, to butchers, to taxi drivers, and others in service roles (Cassell & Bishop, 2014) and, indeed, sex workers (Grandy & Mavin, 2012).

While sex work does not always involve physical or literal dirt (although it sometimes does), this is beside the point; because of its moral attributions as the “archetypal form of female deviance” (Scott, 2019) sex work stigma or “whore stigma” (Pheterson, 1993, p. 39) is inescapable as a part of the perceived undesirability of the work. In this way, all sex workers are tainted by the work regardless of the way it is embodied. For instance, phone sex operators do not even share physical space with their client, let alone have contact with any bodily fluids, and yet their work remains sullied regardless (Selmi, 2012). A lens that can be used to explore why sex work is relegated to the field of dirty work is Rubin’s (1984) theory of acceptable and unacceptable sex. Commercial sex falls outside of the accepted boundaries delineated by society, and is low on the sex hierarchy (Rubin, 1984). This means that those performing the work – the sex – are automatically relegated to the dirty. The field of organisational research has become interested in sex work and the subsequent identity work (and the intersection of professional and gender identity) in recent times (Grandy, 2006; Mavin & Grandy, 2013), as sex work becomes a rich site for examination due to both the stigma of dirty work, the gendered and sexualised nature of the work, and the strong occupational cultures.

As well as the representation in mainstream media and this quasi-political discourse, news reporting about the death of sex workers is consistently graphic, and focuses on the worker’s profession as a reason for their death (Kyriacou, 2014). Particularly in cases of transgender women, most recently seen in the reporting around the murder of Mayang Prasetyo, their gender identity and profession become salacious news items. In this case, Prasetyo was horrifically referred to by a newspaper as a “she male, a prostitute and a hooker wife” (Meade, 2015, para. 6) in reporting that was later found to breach press standards. Whilst the ruling of a standards breach was important, reporting such as this is commonplace and becomes normalised next to the backdrop of wider society’s problematic discourse about sex workers which positions them as inseparable from their workplace identities as dirty workers.

Of course, as well as understanding sex workers through Hughes’ (1962) framework of dirty work, recognising the structural gendered expectations of women is important in understanding the stigma surrounding female sex worker’s identities. Dominant gender norms position women in

particular understandings of femininity, which differ across contexts (Abel, 2011). The women who engage in the sex industry behave outside of their gendered expectations and, thus, inhabit a what Goffman refers to as aspoiled identity (Goffman, 2009). Their sexual agency and economic use of their sexuality upsets patriarchal constructs of what femininity is, and this paired with the dirty aspects of work creates a site for potent professional (and personal) stigma. The gendered nature of this stigma spills over into academic discourse about sex workers, where, interestingly, some researchers are able to position male sex workers as more complex in their relationships with clients due to the differing gendered expectations of sex workers and male sexuality (Minichiello et al., 2013; E. Smith, 2016).

Despite the gains made in sex workers' rights over the last few decades, it is still safe to say that the whore stigma endures and occurs at different levels dependant on (perceived) class, criminalisation and legalisation, global location, and gender identity (Benoit, Smith, et al., 2018).

As put by Krüsi et al. (2016) from their work in Vancouver:

Coexisting stigmatising assumptions of sex workers as 'at risk' and 'risky', both victims and victimisers, deny sex workers the opportunity to engage as citizens, facilitate the removal of sex workers from public space and perpetuate labour conditions that render sex workers at increased risk for violence and poor health including increased risk for HIV/STIs due to constrained ability to negotiate sexual risk reduction. (p. 1139)

Women working in the sex industry are endowed with "double deviancy" (Sanders, 2017, p. 737) because of the way that they deviate from what is expected of the female gender. Berg (2015) points out that sex workers inhabit a unique position under capitalism in that:

while this system comprises the extent to which all workers can, within the realm of the normal, lay claim to a self outside of work, sex workers are particularly precarious within it because of the ways their work is reviled. (p. 24)

I now move on to consider how the enduring stigma faced by sex workers effect their identity work (Koken, 2012). I explore how identity work and other forms of resistance (Weitzer, 2017) remain a large part of the lives of sex workers.

Sex work identity management and negotiation of stigma

The label of "sex worker" (as distinct from "prostitute") was coined by Carol Leigh (1997), post "sex wars", when the sex worker voice began to emerge in the literature. Leigh (AKA Scarlet Harlot) arguably pioneered this movement of sex workers writing published works about themselves (Leigh, 1997; Delacoste & Alexander, 1987). She can, therefore, be credited with

enabling our contemporary understandings of “sex worker” as a distinct occupation-based identity. The term “sex worker” is defined in the preliminary section of this thesis, however, it is important to note that it is a political term (M. Smith & Mac, 2018, p. 1) just as “queer” or even “homosexual” is, and not everyone who meets the criteria will choose to self-identify as a sex worker. Similarly, not every man who has sex with other men chooses to identify as gay, leading to health campaigns aimed at “MSM” –men who have sex with men – rather than “gay men” (Newman et al. 2018). Intriguingly though, a study shows that the majority of the emerging population of women who use the online platform *OnlyFans*, do identify with the label of sex worker, fifty years after the term was originally coined, long before user generated social media platforms were in existence (Rodriguez, 2022, p. 37). The term “sex worker” represents an important theoretical shift in the way that the literature (and, indeed, mainstream discourse) conceptualised the “prostitute” from a deviant or desperate victim to a consenting worker with agency and self-awareness.

Sex work is not the only work identity to encounter stigma or to pre-empt identity work, and academics have explored strategies used in other industries as well. Hochschild’s (1979) air hostesses, for example, performed “emotion work” to manage their interactions with patrons, and constructed workplace identities within the requirements set by their employers, such as always appearing friendly and happy (Hochschild, 1979). What is unique for sex workers, as opposed to other professions, is the “complicated interactions between a female’s identity and sexuality” (Selmi, 2012, p. 115). There have also been critiques of Hochschild’s (1979) framework of emotional labour assuming a heteronormative body and actor and suggesting a “falsely unified definition” (Tweedy, 2019, p. 172) of woman/hood.

As mentioned above, Rubin’s (1984) hierarchy of acceptable sexualities can be used to establish the undesirability of sex work compared to acceptable forms of sexuality, such as heterosexual sex within the confounds of marriage and the gendered sexuality required of air hostesses. Because women’s sexuality is used as a measure of their worth, and, thus, becomes a marker of their identities, sex workers’ transgression of acceptability means that their professions are inextricably linked to their identities and social worth in a more profound way than for other professional identities. Brewis and Linstead (2000) find that for sex workers constructing identity:

Sites such as sex work, where work and leisure, production and consumption, naturally intersect are therefore especially important for the understanding of contemporary self-identity. Here areas traditionally (p)reserved as private, such as the body, become commercially traded and are consumed as the boundary with the public sphere is rendered permeable. (p. 169)

Indeed, for the anti-prostitution campaigners Davidson and O'Connell (2002), being a sex worker "permanently, completely and literally extinguishes her as a subject" (p. 92), and Davidson further argues that a woman must give up her very personhood in order to perform what is wanted by the client (Davidson, 1998). In other words, once a woman begins to work in the sex industry, she is branded with whore stigma (Pheterson, 1993), which is a uniquely sexualised way that the dirty work phenomenon plays out for sex workers.

Emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979) is linked with a number of professional roles (Tweedy, 2019) and sex work roles are no exception (H. Murphy et al., 2015). Having established the weight of sex workers' professional identities on their identities as a whole, sex work scholarship moved focus to examine how sex workers manage such identities. A plethora of contemporary literature explores the coping strategies used by sex workers. These data can be separated into broad categories as follows: separation, role play, and deep acting (Abel, 2011; Kooy, 1998; Phoenix, 1999; Stardust, 2015); a focus on the work (Abel et al., 2007; Abel, 2011; Benoit, Smith, et al., 2018; Foley, 2017; Koken, 2012; Kong, 2006; McDowell, 1997; H. Murphy et al., 2015; Sanders, 2005); intentional boundary setting and manufactured intimacy (Barton, 2007); conscious resistance and reimagining the work as an essential service (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Selmi, 2012; E. Smith, 2014); a focussing on the pleasure or glamour of the work (Doezema, 2013; Skeggs, 1997; E. Smith, 2016); refocussing on co-existing identities such as "mother" or "student" (Basnyat, 2020; Dodsworth, 2014; Ma et al., 2019; Trautner & Collett, 2010); humour (Sanders, 2004b); distancing oneself from the sex work community and peers (Barton, 2007); and the opposite approach – development of a strong occupational culture and connection with peers (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014; Grandy & Mavin, 2012). This last stigma management strategy – a connection to peers and community – becomes of significant focus in this study and, thus, will be explored more fully in the next section.

The Sex Worker community

Importantly, given the experiences of stigma outlined above, sex workers rely on their peers for solidarity, to find group identity, and for information sharing purposes given the clandestine nature of the work. This section will discuss the importance of group belonging for stigmatised identities, including stigmatised professional identities. It will present literature collected on the experience of sex workers within the community setting. Then, the strong legacy of community-led initiatives that strive to further the health, safety, and wellbeing of individual workers will be

presented. Lastly, I argue that there is a legacy of queer leadership in sex worker communities, both in contemporary Australia and historically on an international level.

When discussing sex worker identity, we need to understand the enormous impact of sex worker communities on identity formation for individual workers. As well as the impact that peers have on service provision and legal reform (discussed below), sex workers do not exist in a vacuum; even if individual workers do not have strong links to other sex workers (for instance, they work privately or online), the communities we belong to have an impact on the way we feel about ourselves and each other. Because the experience of being a sex worker can be isolating due to its clandestine nature (for example, not being able to share the trials and tribulation of your workday with civilians), community can become incredibly important. This banding together of industry workers has been identified as “Communities of Coping” by Korczynski (2003) who discussed it as a way that individual service workers support each other to manage a challenging environment. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, a driver to enter academia as a sex worker can be a hope to find peers and comradeship.

Of course, as in all communities, disparity of opportunity and social exclusion exist within sex worker communities. Examples of disparity within the community can be found in the literature. Stryker (2015) identifies herself as fat and talks about how this is stigmatised by her own sex worker community and Sterk (2000) found significant differences in social status between drug using and non-drug using sex workers in the American context. Some participants in Grünke-Horton’s (2016) study found working in a brothel provided a physical community which translated into increased safety. However, others felt that brothels could also mean that some services and standards are normalised (such as giving oral sex without a condom, known as uncovered blowjobs), and working with other service providers meant an increased expectation to conform to the norms of the workplace (Grünke-Horton, 2016, p. 102). Similarly, Read (2014) found that kin ties between street-based sex workers impacted on their agency in relation to other members of the community.

Inter-community identity relations

On the one hand, as soon as an individual crosses the moral line and accepts money or goods in exchange for sex in a commercial setting, she is branded with the tainted whore identity, or whore stigma (Pheterson, 1996) and, yet, on the other, because of this tight-knit and fiercely political community, an insecure work identity can trouble any sense of camaraderie or belonging (Knights

& Clarke, 2013). Ideas of “peer research” and “lane discourse” are addressed in Chapter Three which discusses community gatekeeping and seeks to answer the question, “who has the right to speak for sex workers?” Whilst all sex workers experience stigma regardless of the embodied dirt in their dirty work, the “whorearchy” is important to discuss here because experiences of stigma are far from homogenous (Stardust, 2020, p. 27). Benoit et al.’s (2018) findings align with the majority of existing literature in that they find that sex workers are not a homogenous group; rather they have diverse and complex experiences. Experiences of stigma, however, are patterned: “overall, indoor workers appear to fair better, as do women and trans workers, those who use fewer addictive substances, who report lower perceived stigma and who began selling sexual services in adulthood” (Benoit, Smith, et al., 2018, p. 78).

The stigma experienced aligns with Johnstone’s (2007) findings that “men demonstrated the most negative attitudes towards women in street prostitution, less negative attitudes towards women in escorting and the least negative attitudes towards women in exotic dancing” (p. iii). This “whorearchy” is reinforced by sex workers themselves, such as the strippers in Frank’s (2003) research who create distance between their work and that of full-service workers (Frank, 2003; Tyler, 2012), but this stigma still has a significant impact on wellbeing (Benoit et al., 2015; Benoit, Jansson, et al., 2018; E. Douglas, 2004; Koken, 2012). Although stigma is unevenly distributed across different sections of the industry, it remains “omnipresent” in commercial sex work as a whole (Weitzer, 2017). Treloar et al. (2021) found that peer support services are important to reducing the stigma felt by sex workers in seeking services (ergo, increasing mental wellbeing), and decriminalisation. However, contributing to stigma reduction is not the only important step forward (Treloar et al., 2021). A discussion about how the whorearchy is experienced by participants in this study, in particular, occurs in Chapter Seven.

A political community

Because the act of identifying as a sex worker is political (as discussed above), being involved in the sex work community becomes a political act, too (Mensah, 2013). Stardust (2020) presents an idea of the “joint struggle” engaged in by sex workers, despite the heterogenous nature of individual agents and experiences in the community, saying that:

So when we talk about ‘nothing about us without us’ in sex worker organising and among porn performers specifically, we are not a monolithic group—we are really a heterogeneous alliance of people of different identities, experiences and projects, classing ourselves together as a political alliance for a particular joint struggle. (p. 27)

While an individual sex worker may lack power, groups of sex workers (similar to all other groups of workers) can band together to support each other in workplace bargaining (Kooy, 2001), and provide mutual aid and advocacy. Stardust (2020) goes on to urge sex workers to beware of following the pattern of the gay rights movement which saw that “when you only have privileged people at the top directing where the movement is going, it becomes very assimilatory and hand in hand with a capitalist state” (p. 28).

Sex workers have long been at the forefront of their own movement for sex worker rights, as well as many other connected social causes (Toone, 2018). As Smith and Mac argue (2018), despite their exclusion from some mainstream feminist spaces, “sex workers are the original feminists” (p. 4), engaging in activism, mutual aid, and organising throughout Europe, America, Africa, and beyond. Despite sex workers being a heterogenous group, it has been said that “stigmatisation and the desire to take concerted action” are a defining feature of the sex worker community (Mensah, 2013, p. 85). Margot St James, sex worker and founder of the American sex worker rights group COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) said that “it takes about two minutes to politicise a hooker” (cited in Chateauvert, 2014).

Notable examples of the power of the sex work community as a political movement include the sex worker strike in 1975 Paris, and the subsequent strike in the UK in 1982 (Kurbanoglu, 2011). Kurbanoglu (2011) argues that, in comparison to other worker strikes, the goal of these actions was less about material interests, and more about non-material interests. Both strikes occurred against a backdrop of other workers’ strikes, and in protest of police brutality, custody laws, and the failure of the state to recognise sex work as work, and protect workers accordingly. The International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers is marked by sex workers globally on December 17th each year and was originally held as a memorial for sex workers killed by the Green River Killer (Strohmayr, 2019). More contemporary practices of protest and performance have been explored in the literature by Jeffreys (E. Jeffreys, 2006), particularly in the space of HIV awareness campaigns (E. Jeffreys & Fawkes, 2018). Jeffreys argues that community organising by sex workers has occurred in waves throughout time (E. Jeffreys, 2018b).

In the Australasian contemporary context, along with the grey literature and projects described in the introduction of this thesis, peer-led organisations, groups and individuals have been strong activists committed to political causes. Kurbanoglu (2011) argues that Scarlett Alliance, the national sex work body, is “arguably the most legitimate sex workers union in the world today” (p.

164). The New Zealand Prostitutes Collective led the campaign that successfully achieved law reform resulting in the 2003 decriminalisation of sex work in Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Barnett et al., 2010). Similarly, in the New South Wales fight for decrim, the Australian Prostitutes' Collective (APC) was founded in 1983 and finally achieved decriminalisation of brothels in NSW in 1995 (Aroney & Crofts, 2019). The Collective achieved this win "through the production of original primary quantitative and qualitative research of their working conditions" (Aroney & Crofts, 2019, p. 52). In their account of the journey in NSW, Frances and Grey state that "from the 1970s onwards prostitutes began to publish newsletters, form collectives and push for unionisation and the support they received from the women's movement and civil libertarians would have inspired many to continue to battle for workplace rights" (R. Frances & Gray, 2007, p. 308). Sex workers have played an important role in community sexual education, and particularly so in the queer community (Stardust, 2020). In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the National Cabinet of Whores was formed to facilitate fundraising and become a national voice in the interests of sex workers' rights during this period (Diamond, 2020).

Many leaders within peer-based organisations in Australia have also become prolific academic writers, dominating the contemporary literature. This important shift has similarly occurred with the activism of other marginalised communities, such as disabled people creating "crip theory" (Sandahl, 2003), Black Americans moving towards critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995), and consumers of mental health services identifying "mad studies" (Ingram, 2016). Activists such as Jules Kim, Elena Jeffreys, Zahra Stardust, Janelle Fawkes, Ryan Cole, Jane Green, and Roxana Diamond have emerged as leaders of peer sex work writing (see Diamond, 2022; Fawkes, 2014; E. Jeffreys, 2010; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013; Stardust, 2015; Treloar et al., 2021). Whilst the breadth of peer literature is beyond the scope of this thesis, a brief overview is provided here.

As Zahra Stardust states in her recent contribution to a collection of chapters about navigating fieldwork:

The infiltration of sex workers into academia has offered new lenses through which to understand sexual commerce. Sex work research is plagued by a history of voyeurism, victimisation and sexual tourism without sufficient regard for the lives, rights and demands of sex workers themselves. Being a sex working researcher raises multiple challenges in the field. But being in the academy brings further risks. (Stardust, 2020, p.13)

Some peer researchers, such as Janelle Fawkes, focus on empirical research to speak back to misleading and harmful historical and contemporary health research (Fawkes, 2014) as well as

theoretical research (Fawkes, 2005). Fawkes is a prime example of writers who inhabit multiple spaces; peer, academic, activist, and policy worker. As a previous president and CEO of Scarlet Alliance, as well as a number of other health and community organisations, Fawkes is a staunch advocate for decriminalisation and provides scathing reviews of anti-sex work rhetoric. She has contributed a plethora of grey literature but also made significant contributions to scholarly collections (Fawkes, 2005, 2014), most recently in collaboration with Dr Elena Jeffreys (Cole et al., 2015; E. Jeffreys et al., 2012; E. Jeffreys & Fawkes, 2018).

Jeffreys, who is also a strong advocate for decriminalisation with a legacy that spans twenty years of community work, published her PhD in 2018 which focused on sex worker organisations (E. Jeffreys, 2018b). Jeffreys' publications are too vast to list here, however, some notable areas she has written about are research with sex workers (E. Jeffreys, 2010; Kim & Jeffreys, 2013), HIV (E. Jeffreys et al., 2012), migration (E. Jeffreys & Perkins, 2011; E. Jeffreys, 2014), decriminalisation (E. Jeffreys et al., 2011), protest (E. Jeffreys, 2006) and, importantly for this project, queer sex work (E. Jeffreys, 2013) and the exclusion of sex workers from mainstream queer communities (Cole et al., 2015). And, again, in the grey literature, Jeffreys has spoken up about the divide between the queer and sex worker communities (E. Jeffreys, 2018a).

Jules Kim, again, has contributed both to the academic sphere, as well as working in public health and activism, including her recent role as CEO of Scarlet Alliance. Her extensive work includes writing on community health issues such as disease prevention through decriminalisation (Kim, 2015) and addressing stigma (Treloar et al., 2021), and other contemporary issues such as the links between the AIDS epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic (Buse et al., 2020).

Dr Zahra Stardust also has an extensive legacy working in the field of community health where sex work organisations are linked to HIV prevention and queer communities through funding streams. Stardust, also linked to Scarlet Alliance, writes about the intersection of law and sex, with a focus on sex work, and describes herself by stating, "I am a sex worker first and a researcher second. Or a writer second – I love writing. The research is really a means to document stories around me" (2020, p. 13).

Stardust articulates here the weight of insider knowledge in sex work research and the importance of writing about our own experiences. As mentioned above, she has written with Kim and Treloar about stigma (Treloar et al., 2021) and sex work more broadly, but her focus is on porn (Stardust, 2014, 2018; Stardust & Patten, 2020). Most relevant for this study, she also writes about

queerness, femmephobia, and sex work in the important edited volume *Queer Sex Work* (Stardust, 2015) and, most recently, ethics in activist research (Stardust, 2020). Stardust's focus on porn relates to her professional experience as a porn star.

Elizabeth Smith's (2014, 2016) work in Victoria, Australia uses photo-elicitation to discuss identity building and pleasure with nine Victorian women sex workers. In her work on the benefits of photo-elicitation with sex workers, Smith (2015) argues that photo-elicitation can assist in drawing together participants' experiences of two simultaneous phenomena (for example, sex work and motherhood). What sets Smith's work apart from the other peer researchers here is her explicit acknowledgment of her role as "both 'researcher' and 'past sex worker'" (2015, p. 243) in her auto-ethnographical exploration of photo-elicitation as method. Her own reflections of undertaking the research from this unique position become a form of data in themselves. Smith (2015) provides us a vulnerable look at her experience as both a "novice researcher" undertaking a PhD, as well as a past sex worker.

Most importantly for this thesis, Kooy, who self identifies as a queer woman and past exotic dancer, published a dissertation about lesbian sex workers (Kooy, 1998) and an article about the queer labour organising of sex workers (Kooy, 2001). Kooy's work contains in-depth exploration of lesbian sex workers and her thesis is discussed throughout this work. The inclusion of peer authors' work outlined in this section has sought to illustrate the emerging power and resistance of sex workers telling their own stories in the literature. This work seeks to continue this scholarship by more thoroughly exploring identity practices and experiences of queer sex workers in contemporary Australia.

Stigmatised communities; queers, sex workers and queer sex workers

Throughout the history of research on sex workers, links have been drawn between sex working women and lesbians, not necessarily as the same subjects, but as comparable sexual deviants (Chapkis, 2000; J. Miller, 2010; Sanger, 1858). Given that the literature has argued the importance (and political power) of group belonging for sex workers due to the criminalised, transient, and stigmatised nature of the work, social exclusion from this already marginalised group is likely to have a significant effect on identity construction and practices. Research to date, however, has neglected to empirically examine the experience of queer or lesbian sex workers within the broader sex worker community. What we do know about both analogous communities is discussed here.

In contemporary health and welfare programs, sex workers are positioned in the “at risk” categories along with LGBTIQ individuals. There are clear parallels between the experiences of queer communities and sex worker communities, including the capacity to challenge stigmatised identities through collectivism:

In the same way that community building and mentoring occurs within sex work communities, queer communities heal through collective identity and personal and political solidarity. In both populations, oppression and marginalisation is shared, and activism can act as a counter to trauma and feelings of powerlessness. There is also a certain fluidity of identities in each community, related to sexuality, gender, political persuasion and even chosen names. Queered sex work has the power to create new language for bodily autonomy and consent, and to transcend traditional approaches to working through trauma and toward self-actualisation. (Avenatti & Jones, 2015, p. 92)

Just as homosexual individuals and collectives led the fight for the decriminalisation of homosexual acts, and subsequent declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder, sex working individuals and collectives have led the fight for decriminalisation and law reform around the laws that govern sex work in a global context (Toone, 2018). Whilst the parallels have been explored, most research occurring at the intersection of both queerness and sex work focusses on the intersecting health risks and vulnerabilities (Browne et al., 2010; Lyons et al., 2019). Actual experiences of queer and lesbian individuals who also exist within the sex work community have only briefly been examined. Delacoste and Alexander’s (1987) collection of narratives from the late 80s includes first-hand accounts of self-identifying lesbian women who speak about difficulties within the lesbian and queer community and the acceptance of sex workers lesbian identities as being valid. The “Sex Wars” debates of the time are influential in some women’s experiences, as one of their participants stated:

Not surprisingly, the debates over pornography, butch/femme and s/m have erupted into roaring controversies, with those on the exploring sexuality side denounced as being brainwashed and as oppressing other women. (Morgan, 1987, p. 25)

Another of their writers boldly proclaimed that *all* of the women she worked with in the sex industry were lesbians, and yet the stigma attached to performance of sexual acts with men meant that little support came from the queer communities:

The rest of the lesbian community offered little support. There are tons of lesbians who don’t like heterosexual women, or women who are involved with men, and they can’t stand prostitutes. They don’t ever identify lesbians as being prostitutes, the two are like extremes to them. There’s never any meeting. (Alexander, 1987, p. 54)

There appears to be an over-representation of queer sex workers present in sex worker rights campaigns (Dennermalm, 2014). One example comes from Kooy (2001) who discusses the unionisation of strippers at the *Lusty Lady* in San Francisco, and remarks that majority of the organisers were queer women:

Interestingly— but not surprisingly— the majority of the organizing drive’s key activists were lesbians, bisexuals, or people who at least slept with the same gender on occasion. There may be many reasons for this phenomenon, but a primary one is that gays and lesbians are no strangers to fighting for fair and equal treatment, especially around sexual issues. Similar to the way the queer community has rallied against heterosexual hegemony, sex workers have organized to convince the general public that erotic labor is a legitimate occupation. (p. 113)

Mostly notably, experiences of queer sex workers are explored in the 2015 publication aptly titled *Queer Sex Work*, edited by Mary Laing, Katy Pilcher, and Nicola Smith. Weitzer described the collection as an “antidote to the dominant, heteronormative orientation of most research and policymaking regarding commercial sex” (Weitzer, 2015) and it contains a plethora of experiences from people working in the sex industry who identify as queer, as well as exploring the tradition of whether *all* sex work is inherently queer. This philosophical discussion is beyond the scope of the study having been debated and explored by many writers previously (McKay, 1999; N. J. Smith & Laing, 2012; Stardust, 2015). In particular, two contributions in *Queer Sex Work* are significant for this work. Stryker (2015), in documenting her experience of being a fat woman across both sex worker and queer communities, showed the way that intersectionality added to her exclusion from both.

Even as I found my own stride, I struggled to get recognition from others within the queer sex work community, particularly in the area of pornography. It is hard enough to market the non-male gaze-oriented queer erotic on its own – with every identity you add (person of colour, trans*, non-binary gender, fat, disabled), a sex worker can see their work possibilities get fewer and further between. While some queer sites enjoyed working with me, others would consider me less marketable than slimmer, more fit queer performers and would decline in the interests of more success. Just as the outliers of the queer community found to be true of the greater lesbian/gay movement, sometimes your own community will employ the same ‘acceptability’ policing techniques as society in the name of ‘the greater message’. ‘We’ll come back for you’, they say, to the trans* people fighting for gay rights, to the fat sex workers asking to work in queer porn. ‘When we succeed, we’ll come back for you.’ History shows that to be unlikely. (Stryker, 2015, pp. 96–97)

The second section of significance for this study was Cole et al. (2015) highlighting their experience of the whorephobia perpetrated by “lesbian institutions” within the Australian context, documenting examples where queer sex workers are invisibilised and silenced by the broader queer community, as evident through the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras:

Sydney Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras in 2012 asked Scarlet Alliance, the Australian Sex Workers Association, whether the sex worker float entry was 'queer enough' to be included in the march (Green 2012). This was after a long history of successful sex worker floats and involvement in Mardi Gras. At the time there was speculation that the rise of the same-sex marriage campaign was the cause of the marginalisation of sex workers from Mardi Gras, due to concerns that drawing attention to sex worker issues might damage this more mainstream cause...Having visible, out sex workers, as a part of Mardi Gras would potentially contradict or undermine this message of respectability. (Cole et al., 2015, p. 222)

Conversely, the Australian Federal Police, Google, and Optus, all participants in the 2012 parade, were not asked to prove their queerness to legitimise their position as part of the celebration (Cole et al., 2015).

The legacy of the sex wars continues in many feminist and queer communities of this century; gay respectability (Russell, 2015) and lateral violence (Toone, 2018) are two frameworks to explain the whorephobia perpetrated by the broader queer community. Stardust (2015) speaks about her experience of exclusion perpetrated by the lesbian community: "I've been told I'm not a real lesbian because I wear heels" (p. 69). The Australian examples here are in stark contrast to what Kooy (1998) discovered in her study based in San Francisco. Her participants do not face the invisibilising effect of queer communities who deny entry to sex workers, nor do they echo Stryker's (2015) intersectional experience of exclusion. Instead, they report acceptance of their status as gay women who do sex work:

When I first began this research project, I had assumed that the participants would experience a great deal of prejudice as a result of being sex industry workers and gay women. But most of the women in this study were positive about being a lesbian/bisexual/queer sex worker. Some of them even expressed that they had acquired a special kind of knowledge as a result of their experiences. Others felt that it wasn't "a big deal;" being both was not confusing or disconcerting. A few of the women remarked that they were excited by the rebellious and scandalous nature of their identities. For the most part, the participants carefully chose their communities in order to avoid the stigma which mainstream society attaches to queers and sex industry workers. (Kooy, 1998, p. 133)

Kooy (1998) admits that the context of her participants is within the "San Francisco bubble" (p. 128) which makes their experiences undoubtedly unique. Aside from what has been documented by Cole et al. (2015), Stryker (2015), and Stardust (2015) here, we know very little about lesbian and queer women's relationships with the broader sex work community in Australia and, conversely, with the queer community. It is unclear whether these women employ identity practices unique to their position at the intersection of both communities where othering and lateral violence is arguably perpetrated by the broader queer community towards queer sex workers. To date, the literature also does not address whether there is homophobia directed from

the sex working community towards individuals at these intersecting experiences and, as such, this leaves an important area to address.

Lesbian sex workers

Demographic evidence of lesbian sex workers

Aside from the above explorations of the way that queer women sex workers negotiate their communities using political activism, little is known about the lives of sex working women who identify with non-normative sexuality identities. While most of the literature focused on sex workers largely ignores alternative personal sexual identities, the following studies do explicitly identify lesbian women working in the sex industry, with some suggesting that lesbians are over-represented in the industry (Barton 2001, Harcourt & Donovan 2005). Kooy (1998), whose thesis is discussed above, actually posited that this purported over-representation claimed by other authors was a myth or misunderstanding due to the amount of female-on-female sexuality performed as part of the work in sex work.

Trailblazing quantitative data drawn from the Australian context in the Nineties showed that while women working in the sex industry mostly identified as heterosexual, 21.1% identified as bisexual, and 9.4% as homosexual (Perkins, 1991 p. 210). In the international context, Barton (2001) found that 12 out of her 22 participants in a study about strippers, identified as bisexual:

Of these, two were in committed relationships with women. Three dancers identified themselves as exclusively lesbian and seven as heterosexual. It is possible that the high numbers of bisexual and lesbian women among my informants reflect a biased sample. Queer dancers may have been more likely to trust me because I am a lesbian too. (Barton, 2001, p. 7)

Harcourt and Donovan (2005) provided a typology of sex work and claimed that “equally many female sex workers identify as lesbian” (p. 204) but failed to include any evidence or further discussion of these experiences. More recently, however, an Australian study found only two of 95 “call girls” (private escorts) and six of 124 “brothel workers” identified as “homosexual” (Perkins and Lovejoy, 2007). Yet, a contrasting Australian study in 2017 found that six of ten South Australian sex workers interviewed identified their sexuality as something other than “straight” (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017). Still in Australia, Treloar et al. (2021) describe the composition of their cohort as 7 heterosexual, 7 lesbian or gay, 4 bisexual, and a staggering 14 as queer. Aside from these contradictory findings, the sample sizes here are clearly prohibitive of reaching a conclusive argument about over-representation. Moving away from statistical evidence of queer sexualities in sex work, Lyons et al. (2014) recognise the intersection of sex work and a lesbian or queer

identity (both marginalised groups) as a potential health determinant with Lim et al. (2017) further finding these two factors contributing to a person's risk of homelessness.

Identity practices of lesbian sex workers

Given the inconsistencies in the data reported above, it is clearly challenging to classify a statistical over-representation sex workers who also claim a non-straight sexuality. Rather than focusing on quantifiable statistics, the current study simply understands that there *are* women who identify within these categories. The purpose of this study is, rather, to understand how this experience impacts on participants' identity practices and self-making. Unsurprisingly, due to difference in theoretical framework, geographical contexts, and the way that researchers themselves are situated within the research, existing data which examine the experiences of identity practices is inconsistent. Whilst there are some similarities to stigma management strategies used by the broader sex work communities, the intersection of non-normative sexuality becomes apparent. As Thomas notes, "the idea of lesbian sex workers is a powerful notion that interrupts many social assumptions about identity, women's power and of course, same sex relationships and sex workers" (A. Thomas, 2006).

Perkins and Lovejoy's (2007) work presents many sex workers who comment on their sexual relationships with other women, whether they label themselves as queer or lesbian or not, with one participant stating that:

Although I can have sex with women, and I can say that women are much more enjoyable in bed than men, I wouldn't class myself as bisexual because I don't fall in love with women. Although that may not be the definition of bisexual, ... because to me my sexuality revolves around what creates emotion in me... (p. 43)

Shrage (1999) identifies deep acting within the experiences of lesbian sex workers, some of which do not classify their intercourse with clients as sex at all.

The sex worker is merely performing a skilled and highly routinized service. She plays a role that involves certain forms of bodily contact in order to allow her client to satisfy his sexual fantasy or desire. Since her sexual desires are not part of the interaction, her bodily performance is merely a means through which the client achieves sexual satisfaction. (p. 260)

A firsthand account in *Agenda*, a women's magazine from 1996, echoes Shrage's (1999) claim, with the writer explaining that due to the innate difference between men and women, sex work with men can become an act or a game, differentiated from her personal life (Store, 1996). Some women do, however, speak of a struggle with the physical aspects of providing sexual services to

men and the ways in which the physical act of performing heterosex is made sense of in relation to queer identity: “Where do I go, then? Do I go into my fantasy – he is a woman with a dildo, who’s going to be fucking me – or do I actually travel here, somehow, into my future, to give myself strength?” (Summers, 1987, p. 116)

Participants in the largest study of lesbian sex workers to date had a variety of understandings of their identities (Kooy, 1998). As discussed above, Kooy identified herself as a peer researcher and conducted ethnographic research with seventeen female sex workers who self-identified as lesbian, bisexual, or queer, in the San Francisco Bay Area (an area rich with sex worker and queer history). Some participants felt that being a lesbian or “dyke” assisted them in maintaining boundaries between themselves and their clients, as they were able to clearly separate work and their personal sex lives with other women. One participant again understood her work as performative: “I played a role. I was an actor. I was an actor providing certain services. It didn’t have anything to do with my sexuality. It had a lot to do with theirs, I guess. That’s what they were paying me for” (p. 59). Many other participants corroborated this idea and discussed creating a whole separate persona distinct from their selves outside of work, to assist them in the task of maintaining boundaries.

Looking at similar phenomena in a different occupational context, it was reported by air hostesses that they understood that “all types of work involve acting” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 61) and didn’t necessarily see a conflict in their acting of a heterosexual sexual performance, similarly to sex workers (Sanders, 2005; Abel, 2011). The separation of identities emerges as a prominent theme in understanding how sex workers negotiate identity for Kooy’s (1998) participants. Again, the current research intends to unpack whether this is true for contemporary lesbian sex workers in the Australian context and whether sexual identity impacts this notion of separation. As Kooy’s (1998) participants noted that their identity performances became more complex when other women were involved, either as clients or as colleagues, it may be understood that the performance of a heterosexual persona was harder to maintain in the presence of a same-sex sexual participant. Barton (2001) is one of few authors who outright name the tension between a homosexual sexuality and sex work in a largely heterosexual context. She cites that the sex industry can facilitate “easy access to other women, invite them to break taboos, and teach them disdain for men” (Barton, 2001, p. 3).

Grey literature

As with academic literature, sex workers themselves have become major contributors to grey literature about sex work (see Therese, 2020 Lawless, 2021; Green, 2021). Exposés on the sex industry have provided titillation in mainstream lit culture for decades but sex workers themselves have seen increased exposure and more public facing personas in more recent years, particularly with the rise of social media as an alternative publishing streams (Tilly Lawless, Jacqueline Frances, Bella Green, and Rita Therese are prime examples of the leveraging of Instagram notoriety preceding traditional publishing deals). This strong presence in grey literature and on social media platforms tells stories of lesbians working in the sex industry, and sex work becomes of great cultural importance in lesbian texts (such as those referenced in Chapter One).

As discussed in the introduction section of this thesis, the existence of lesbian sex workers in important queer and lesbian memoirs became a motivator for this study. Michelle Tea's journey through her American memoirs, particularly *Valencia* (Tea, 2000) and *Rent Girl* (Tea, 2004), included discussions about the intersections between sex work and sexual identity, and lesbianism and queerness. Feinberg's (2003) *Stone Butch Blues* shed light on the historical importance of the sex industry for femme sex workers. Hir² text, although fiction, is set in the pre-Stonewall era of the USA, and sees the narrator Jess, a butch lesbian, discover the links between the sex work done by her femme partners, and the physical labour available to her as a working-class butch of the time. The novel highlights the essential place of this work for femmes, and the way it ostracised them from other lesbians of the era (Feinberg, 2003).

Canadian born Jacqueline Francis (known as @Jacqthestrripper on *Instagram*), became famous after publishing her comic like cartoons of conversations between herself as a stripper and her clientele in the Australian and international context. Her memoir, published in 2015, traced her journey from international traveller to international stripper (J. Frances, 2015). In the current era of social media "influencers", Tilly Lawless, who shot to fame for her campaign using the hashtag #FacesOfProstitution to normalise sex workers, describes herself as a "whore" and a "dyke" (Lawless, 2021). Australian Lawless largely uses her *Instagram* account to share her writing work but has also contributed a TedX talk (2017) and has written for *Archer* magazine, a lesbian

² Hir was the preferred pronoun of Feinberg at the time of Hir death.

publication (2018). Lawless explores her own class and sexual identity, and openly discusses the way that it intersects with her work as a full-service sex worker. Lawless writes:

I was such a top as a teen I always wonder if I never did sex work would I still be one? You don't want to admit that a job affects something as intimate as your sexual preferences because you don't like to think of the professional leaking into the personal but it does! (T. Lawless, Instagram Post, 20 March 2019)

In this sentence published on her Instagram account years after this project began, Lawless encapsulates one of the aims of the research: to explore the effect of sex work on the identities and ways of relating for queer women. She writes for *Archer* magazine about the intersecting whorephobia, homophobia, and femmephobia she experiences, and her eloquence makes the writing poignant yet accessible (Lawless, 2018). Tilly, whose autobiography, *Nothing But My Body* (Lawless, 2021), was published during the final stages of this thesis being written and will appear further in the discussion section of this thesis.

Rita Therese, who has also found fame through her social media presence, published her memoir titled *Come* in 2020. In the novel, amongst detailing the love, loss, addiction, and drama of her life working in different sections of the industry, Rita identifies herself as bisexual, making her work relevant to this study, particularly given Therese's rich explorations of theories of identity and the way they shape how she understands her own self. Therese, musing in a philosophy class, writes:

I think of Jean Paul Sartre. I am Being, playing a role. I embody the role of the Prostitute, I play at being her. I know I am the sum of my choices, there is no God, no path predestined simply by the forks in the road I choose to take, snipping the thread of what could have been. I think about Erving Goffman, and the stigma I embody. I feel my deviant identity is simply a social construction, that what I do is inherently meaningless, an act, two bodies meeting in an exchange. I think about Foucault and his panopticon, and the way I learnt to surveil my own body, staring at it in the mirror. (Therese, 2020, p. 242)

Bella Green (2021) delivered the third autobiography by an Australian queer sex worker to be published within the gestation period of this thesis. Similarly to both Therese (2020) and Lawless (2018), Green has leveraged her social media presence to crack into the traditional publishing sphere. She also performs as a comedian, entertaining sex workers and civilians alike with her jokes about phone sex lines and BDSM dungeons in her show suitably called *Bella Green is Charging For It*. Her book, *Happy Endings* (B. Green, 2021) details her journey through different sectors of the sex industry, and her experiences within the whorearchy (a concept discussed further in Chapter Seven).

The existence of these autobiographies shows a distinct cultural shift away from the exposé type anonymous sex worker autobiographies, such as Dr Brooke Magnanti's *Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl* (de Jour, 2005), published under the pseudonym Belle de Jour (later adapted into a TV series, *Secret Diaries of a Call Girl*) and the similar *Hooked* detailing Amanda Goff's (2015) Australian adventures in high class escorting, again published under the pseudonym, Samantha X, and followed up by *Back On Top* (2017) about her journey into sex work management. Bella, Rita, and Tilly published their books after long stints of Instagram notoriety without the veil of anonymity afforded to the blog writers of the past. The most intimate details of their lives, and their faces, had already reached wide mainstream audiences on Instagram, as well as attracting a dedicated following from other queer sex workers. The ways in which this cultural shift in sex workers' positioning in contemporary society affects my participants is unpacked in Chapter Seven. A historical example of this exposé style novel, Wolsey's 1944 book which details the life of brothel madame Beverly Davis, also includes anecdotes about the existence of lesbians in the brothel (Wolsey, 1944).

In addition to novels, queer sex workers have also told their stories through magazines, an accessible medium for women even in times when they were excluded from other modes of publishing. Two notable examples from North America are *On Our Backs* and *\$pread*. Whilst *On Our Backs* is a tongue in cheek name marking resistance to the second wave feminist magazine *Off Our Backs*, *\$pread* was a sex worker peer-run magazine published from 2005 to 2012 in New York,

created by members of PONY (Prostitutes of New York). *\$pread*, (Aimee et al., 2015a) the anthology that documents the best of the magazine, states that the magazine was supported from the beginning by local LGBTQ rights groups and the community more widely. Compared to the magazine's relationship with "feminist" communities, which they describe as "more complicated" (Aimee et al., 2015b, p. 28), the editors of *\$pread* speak of mutual love and respect between LGBTQ communities and the sex workers they represented:

The LGBTQ community was one of our most consistent allies, partly because both of our communities face stigma because of gender-and-sexuality based discrimination, and partly because a disproportionate large number of LGBTQ people have worked in the sex trades. (Aimee et al., 2015b, p. 27)

\$pread refers to "LGBTQ" sex workers often within its pages however rather than documenting the lives of lesbian women. This is usually in reference to gay male or trans feminine workers. In a similar vein as the magazines, the online blog *Tits and Sass* describes itself as being:

run by sex workers who saw a void when it came to witty commentary on the public image of our industry. The ideas promoted about us in the public eye have an impact on the realities of our lives as sex workers every bit as strong as the law, so we're not letting any more dead hooker or stripper bones jokes pass by without comment. (*Tits and Sass*, n.d., para 1)

These examples show the important legacy of sex workers (often, queer sex workers) writing about themselves and, in addition to written works, sex workers have used other mediums such as film to tell their stories. In particular, the self-described Indian American filmmaker Hima B. produced a short documentary entitled *Straight For The Money* in 1994 which aimed to shine a light on the existence of lesbian and bisexual women working in the sex industry. Almost 30 years later, the film was recently shown at a documentary screening event in Collingwood, Victoria, evidence of its continued importance (Humanitix, n.d.).

In the South Australian context, very little exists in the way of sex workers telling their own stories, presumably because of the fear of legal consequences in the state, with "outdated laws" that criminalise the majority of sex workers and their families (Baratosy & Wendt, 2017). It would be remiss of me, however, to exclude the voice of Pippa O'Sullivan from this literature review. Pippa was an important activist and advocate and a pioneer of internet wordsmithing who wrote of her work and life as a South Australian sex worker under her stage and pen name, Grace Bellavue (2012). One of the first sex workers to successfully use Twitter to build her profile, and a much-loved member of the Adelaide sex work community, she wrote extensively and intimately about her experience of sex work and the mental health struggles that eventually led to her taking her

own life at twenty-seven years of age in October 2015³. Her funeral, held in the packed St Peter's Cathedral in North Adelaide, was attended by sex industry workers, activists, and politicians alike, and her commanding words are a fitting end to this chapter, reminding us of the humanity of the subjects in focus here.

Ultimately we end up naked, re-creating a dance that is millennia old. I'll kick in my professional knowledge, which reduces me to hunting, understanding, and consciously constantly exploring your pleasure spots, psyche and a desire to give you joy...

It is often the moment after sex, even with clients, that I relish the most. The vulnerability and nakedness as two strange humans with temporary paths entwined begin to hesitantly trade life stories, knowledge and experience.

This moment is why I do my job with joy, gratitude and amazement.

Once the chase is gone, we are just two human beings constantly fumbling our way within the world and it is then I begin to see the heart of masculinity which touches me most – the vulnerability.

This phenomena is not consigned to gender (as I see male, female and gender ambiguous, curious and transitioning clients) but merely a universal truth I see in the wake of my work.

Call me sentimental, but it's this glimpse of humanity, which makes me treasure my job the most. (Bellavue, 2012, para. 10-15)

I have shown how lesbian, queer, and straight sex workers have told their stories thus far, whilst being neglected in the literature. They have, however, claimed their space in the grey literature. A purpose of this thesis is to bring these stories into the body of scholarship so that they are legitimised by the academy and with the academic rigour that they deserve.

Conclusion

This literature review has argued that whilst the body of knowledge about sex workers has grown over the last few decades, documentation about the way they experience identity remains limited. Moreover, the literature capturing work-specific identities shows that women from sexual minorities have different experiences than straight women in creating their work identities, as “gender and sexuality are indelibly linked within the context of the workplace” (Tweedy, 2019, p.

³ Though we had friends in common, I did not know Pippa personally but became familiar with her work as I searched for online content in 2015 to understand my experience of the brothel where she had once worked in 2015. I was honoured to attend her funeral. Her death was announced in national and international newspapers and her mother continues Pippa's legacy, fighting for the decriminalisation of sex work in South Australia. Traces of Pippa can still be found on the internet.

192). It has also been shown that this intersection of identities has health and social outcomes for lesbian sex workers, however, less is known about how lesbian sex workers experience and create identity⁴.

Many authors have attempted to understand lesbian identity formation over the last three decades (Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Faderman, 1985; Sophie, 1986; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000) and lesbian workplace identity (Tweedy, 2019; K. Hamilton et al., 2019). A clear gap emerges for this research to explore the intersection of lesbian and sex worker identity more thoroughly in the contemporary Australian landscape. This gap was recently identified in a call for papers by the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* which asked, “What are the experiences of lesbians in different types of workplace contexts (large corporations, small companies, entrepreneurs, business owners, public sector, non-profit, service sector, part-time work, and sex work)?” (Gedro, 2019, p. 141). The special issue was published (Volume 23, Issue 2), though no articles exploring sex work were included.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter examines the theoretical frameworks that underpin my research standpoint and methods used in the study. The chapter also explores the challenges and successes of this process. I argue that as an interdisciplinary approach is an especially meaningful way to develop understanding of the complexities that exist in sex work research (Sanders, 2018), this project will be guided by a phenomenological research tradition, Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977), and queer theory. Specifically, this chapter explains the methods chosen to answer the research question: How do lesbian and queer sex workers in contemporary Australia negotiate their identities and communities as both lesbians/queer, and as women who perform heterosexual sexualities?

Phenomenology understands that people make meaning of the world, and themselves within it, by interpretation (Moustakas, 1994). As the research question asks about sex workers' experience of identity, it is argued that a phenomenological approach is best suited to centring this experience and is consistent with the social constructionist emphasis on "the contribution of subjects to the construction of meanings" (Sarantakos, 2012, p. 40). Laying the groundwork for the methodological lens used in this study, this chapter commences by discussing the theoretical approach chosen to best answer the research question. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977) is chosen as an analytical framework, and this chapter will argue why this is the most appropriate theory, and discuss how Bourdieu's concepts have been furthered by other scholars in ways relevant to this project. Gender capital (Huppatz, 2012), erotic habitus (A. Green, 2008) or erotic capital (Hakim, 2011), gay capital (Morris, 2017), and queer capital (Ward, 2003), along with my own theory of whore capital, will be outlined. The chapter then discusses the significant ethical considerations relevant to this project. Semi-structured interviews were enriched with a visual research method (Oliveiri & Vearey, 2018) – collaged "paper dolls" – and this method, along with the recruitment and sample, are then explained. I will outline the data analysis process as guided by the methodology and briefly explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on my research. This chapter concludes by acknowledging limitations of the study.

Theoretical approach

Influential queer theorist Muñoz (2009) details the complicated task of providing academic testimony on the queer subject due to what he sees as an “especially vexed relationship to evidence” (p. 65).

Historically, evidence of queerness has been used to penalize and discipline queer desires, connections, and acts. When the historian of queer experience attempts to document a queer past, there is often a gatekeeper, representing a straight present, who will labor to invalidate the historical fact of queer lives—present, past, and future. Queerness is rarely complemented by evidence, or at least by traditional understandings of the term. (Muñoz, 2009, p. 65)

Muñoz’s (2009) text asks us to look past conventional knowledge and disrupt the academy by embracing the “ephemera” which he understands as “trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumour” (p. 65). Knowledge is co-constructed through interactions (Letherby, 2003), hence, a qualitative methodology becomes the only option to structure the research (Crotty, 1998). This research is situated within a social constructionist framework which argues that reality is not divided into subject/object dichotomy, and while social norms are learnt and taught, they can also be challenged leading to social change. For example, even the term “lesbian sex workers” instantly disrupts our understanding of what a lesbian is or what a sex worker is. Thinking about the external rhetoric about sex workers (for instance, from sexuality boundary policing), we can imagine how this impacts sex workers’ own understanding of their sexuality. As meanings are changed through interaction, symbolic interactionism explains that people create meanings from symbols, including language (Sarantakos, 2012). This research is concerned with the way that sex workers experience their identity, thus, a symbolic interactionism lens becomes important. Symbolic interactionism recognises that identity shifts and is expressed differently in different contexts.

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) presents a theory of habitus to explain how an individual’s identity is constructed in a reciprocal fashion with their surroundings (the field). Bourdieu’s understanding of the constructed nature of identity guides the approach to this project, although I will argue that due to the “deviance” of their position, sex workers actively and, indeed, consciously construct multiple identities to manage their work. These identities are not formed in a vacuum, they are developed via interaction with discourse around identity categories such as “sex worker”, “lesbian”, and “woman”. Indeed, these categories are discursively constructed in themselves and change between different cultures, in ways both temporal and spatial (Butler, 2011). For example, the definition of “lesbian” shifts and changes depending on the era and the lens of the definer. On

this definition, Phelan (1989) states that a “lesbian, to most English-speakers, is a woman who engages in sex with women; a homosexual woman” (p. 62). Phelan uses Adrienne Rich’s (1980) seminal text, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, to challenge this definition, citing Rich’s idea that, in actuality, lesbianism exists along a continuum and is a “woman identified experience” that does not necessarily include “genital sexual experience” (Phelan, 1989, p. 67). More recently, Tate (2012) uses a social-psychological lens to propose two models of “being a lesbian” which take into account a gendered sense of self, and include or exclude individuals from self-definition as lesbians according to this gendered self. With these examples, we can see how identity categories are constructed by discourse that is continually being redefined and shaped by both internal as well as external debates; thus, identity categories as well as identity itself, are co-constructed by an individual and their surroundings. Although my approach recognises this construction, the discussion section of this thesis will explore whether participants experience a dissonance between their own understanding of their work identity/ies as consciously constructed performances, and commonly held ideas of a “true self”. This notion of an inner true identity is supported by the field of psychology, and popularised in modern Western culture (discussed further below).

The research tradition best suited for this project is phenomenology as:

phenomenology moves qualitative research in the direction of exploring the meaning that individuals attribute to their experiences in their world- to the structure of how an individual or a small group of individuals experiences and makes sense of interactions in social settings. In doing so, phenomenology emphasizes the lived experiences of human interaction and what they mean in relation to the phenomenon in focus. (Durdella, 2017, p. 105)

Given that my research question asks how lesbian and queer sex workers navigate their identities and experiences, it is fitting to use an existential phenomenological approach in that:

Social life is formed, maintained and changed by the basic meaning attached to it by interacting people who respond to each other on the basis of meanings they assign to their world. Social life and objects become significant when they are assigned meanings. (Sarantakos, 2012, p. 43)

Peer research

As a queer woman doing sex work, my own experience of invisibility in the literature was an integral driver for this research, as discussed in the introduction section of this thesis. Disclosing my personal experiences to my participants then became an essential part of establishing validity and rapport necessary to engage in meaningful research with people. As Stardust (2020) reflects

on her auto-ethnographical PhD studies, and the term “field” which is widely used to bracket off the experiences of research participants as “other”:

The concept of ‘the field’ doesn’t really resonate for me as an insider researcher. I understand that social sciences are vexed with questions of gaining access to various ‘hard to reach’ populations and subcultures, but I see that as a legacy of a colonialist, voyeuristic history. In my research there was no pretense that I was a neutral observer. There was no ‘field’. There was just my life. Our lives. ...That’s one benefit of insider research—when you are an active participant in those spaces, you are much more attuned to particular issues facing your communities. Instead of trying to gain access, I think researchers should be thinking about how to build partnerships to support research emerging from within communities. (Stardust, 2020, p. 15)

As a social worker with over a decade of clinical experience, I understand the importance of the relationship in meaningful conversations about topics that may produce shame and discomfort. The interpersonal skills gained in my professional social work practice, as well as my status as a peer (a status I am afforded due to my previous experience as a sex worker), gave a depth to the interviews that, arguably, could not have been achieved by a researcher who was not a queer sex worker themselves. Although it can be argued that a level of performativity will always exist between participant and researcher, because of the risks associated with sex work research (rampant stereotyping, further stigmatization, and use of research to further anti-sex work laws), only peer researchers who can demonstrate pro-sex work politics are afforded access to less guarded data about the experiences of sex workers (Diamond, 2022, p. 17). It is hoped that my interpersonal skills from practice also reduced the performative nature of research participation which can occur, as experienced by Buckingham (1993) in his exploration of interviewing boys about their masculinity and attitudes to television programs. His work illustrates the way that interview data is shaped by participants’ desire to be seen in a particular way by an outsider researcher. Buckingham’s participants perform their masculinity for each other, but also for the researcher, which undoubtedly influences the data collected. For Buckingham, identity markers, in particular gender, are important to the research process in that they impact the relational nature of information shared through engagement with the interview process (Buckingham, 1993). In the same way, my gender, peer status, and interviewing skills reduce the performativity of participants. This occurs because I have an existing level of understanding about sex work and about queer identity (both often misunderstood by outsider researchers).

Peer research, of course, has both challenges and advantages. Challenges can include difficulty in ensuring confidentiality, particularly in such an insular community as queer sex work, and an urge to coax participants into verbalising something that may already be communicated through a

shared understanding with the researcher (for example, a participant gesturing to themselves when stating that they dress “like a lesbian” rather than describing what this actually entails in words). Shared meanings can also, however, create a positive, easy dialogue where participants are free from judgement of outsiders.

Finally, a clear advantage of peer research is the ability to access a population that would otherwise be hesitant to engage with research, particularly when sex workers experience research fatigue (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). Peer status can be contested and unstable, however, and the question of “who gets to speak for sex workers?” relates to my status as a peer and the positionality of “past sex worker” as researcher or “spokesperson” for such a complex community. Internal politics, of course, affect any community and, in particular, the sex work community given the high risk an individual takes when publicly aligning themselves with the community. Peer research is explored more thoroughly by Stardust (2020) speaking about her porn studies, links to community, and the privileging of some voices. Internet discourse regularly erupts over the values and limitations of standpoint theory (Weisman, 2016), identity reductionist politics, or the similar term used during Twitter debates, “lane discourse” (Jiminykrix, 2016). These criticisms trouble the contentious question of who gets to speak for sex workers – a question that is inherently tied to the whorearchy, discussed in Chapter Seven. Gatekeeping of academic status exists within the sex worker academic community, as it does in other communities (Knights & Clarke, 2013), and as the rise of internet discourse allows more and more people to become “experts” in their field, this question of whose knowledge is the purest will surely continue.

Reflexivity

Qualitative research recognises the subjective nature of research, and so positioning myself in the research and as a part of the research process becomes important (Letherby, 2014). Following Gayle Letherby’s (2003) understanding of auto/biographical research along with Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) position on reflexivity and the production of knowledge as a form of cultural product, this work was inspired by my own experiences as a lesbian sex worker and my frustration at the lack of exploration of identity in the literature on sex workers (Letherby, 2003). Indeed, it can be said that when I began this project in 2016, the majority of writings about sex work/ers focused on legalities (Scouler & Carline, 2014), health (sexual transmission of infections) (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005), and the continuing feminist debates around choice (Farley, 2004), rights, and agency of workers (Wahab, 1997). Letherby (2003) argues that, as feminist researchers,

we must go further than simply locating ourselves as researchers in the preface of our work. Instead, we must acknowledge that our 'selves' permeate every aspect of our work, and this work cannot be separated from us in an objective fashion. My location as a peer is the reason that this work feels relevant to me; indeed, this work is personal as much as it is political. Connelly (2010) states that "interpretive phenomenologists do not believe these ideas can be put aside because they are a part of the person; the researcher only can be aware of them and any effect they have on the study" (p. 127). For myself as a researcher, this has meant disclosing my understandings, experiences, and politics around sex work to my participants, and in this thesis. As a feminist researcher following the tradition of Letherby (2003), I concur that research is never objective, and objectivity is located in cis-het male traditions in research. As an intersectional feminist scholar, I believe in the right to bodily autonomy, which includes a pro sex worker approach.

Maintaining reflexivity around my position (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) has become an important part of every stage of the project, particularly when engaging with the community- from design to recruitment, to data collection, and beyond.

Queer theory

Upon beginning my reading about queer theory, I felt it had the 'Tinkerbelle effect' described by Sullivan (2003) in the preface of their *Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*; it was frustratingly "ethereal, quixotic, unknowable" (N. Sullivan, 2003, p. V). Indeed, it is "a sort of vague and indefinable set of practice and (political) positions that has the potential to challenge normative knowledges and identities" (N. Sullivan, 2003, p. 43-44). Or, as described by Jackson and Scott:

Queer theory is not a unified perspective and not easy to define since most of its founding canonical texts do not identify themselves as queer ... It emerged as an approach to dissident sexualities framed within deconstructionist, poststructuralist or postmodern perspectives. (Stevi Jackson & Scott, 2010, p. 19)

And, again, by Sharp and Nilan:

Avoiding a distinct set of ascriptive criteria, queer can be something of a rolling stone, gathering momentum and volume as it travels through various times and spaces to land on a diversity of bodies. (Sharp & Nilan, 2015, p. 452)

Jagose (1996) stated, "queer itself can have neither a fundamental logic, nor a consistent set of characteristics" (p. 96), and Love (2016) went further to say, "queer studies developed as an activist field, and it has always maintained scepticism and even hostility toward the business of academic life" (p. 347). The importance of activism is not lost on me in this project. Since queer

theory emerged as a legacy of lesbian and gay studies, Sullivan (2003) and many other scholars have offered not just one, but numerous understandings of queer theory (Cohen, 1997; Grosz, 1994; Jakobsen, 1998). With this discussion in mind, the main tenets of queer theory that I will use for this work are as follows:

- Queer theorists recognise that sexuality is “discursively constructed” similarly to race.
- Queer theory is about subverting the norm and critically engaging with traditional research methods and categories.
- Queer theory appreciates duplicity and multiple truths, and is not positivist in its beliefs.

Queer theory stems from the post-structural tradition in positing that there is not one universal “truth” that a researcher can uncover, but that we all exist in our own realities and create our own meaning and truths about the world. (N. Sullivan, 2003, p. 39). Instead of fixed ideas of who counts as a “lesbian” and who does not, a poststructuralist may argue, for example, that we only understand “lesbian” alongside the dominant discourse of the time, shaped by our place in the world (this is termed normalising discourses by Foucault (1991). My phenomenological use of queer theory attempts to disrupt binary systems (including heterosexual/homosexual) and, rather than provide solid definitions or facts, investigate how my participants *experience* these categories and their existence within these social structures (Hudson, 2014). Of course, this interacts with my feminist standpoint outlined above.

Whilst the tenets of queer theory will unfurl further throughout this thesis, it is worth noting here that there is a growing argument in the literature that all commercial sex can be viewed as “queered” (N. Smith & Laing, 2012). Halperin’s (1995) definition of queer as a “positionality vis a vis the normative” and “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (p. 62), can be used to justify the claim that selling sexual interactions for money fits that category. It is conceivable, therefore, in a phenomenological study about queer sex workers, to use queer as a verb (“to queer”). The aim of incorporating the “queering” of queer theory is to expand upon, and indeed disrupt, Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice (1972/1977) to better relate to my participants. Smith (2015) warns researchers, however, that queering sex work research is not as simple as “add queer and stir” (p. 13); rather, queering is a process in which participants are actively involved, not passively objectified (N Smith, 2015, p. 17). The destabilising of dominant logics that Smith speaks of resonate in this work about women who identify as lesbian or queer but deviate from traditional definitions of those terms by engaging in (what may be viewed as) heterosexual sex’ – and, by extension, heterosexuality – in their work lives. Smith (2015) argues that even the

act of charging for sex, by placing sex “within the economic” (p. 18), queers the sex itself. At the same time, Smith reminds us that sex work is not devoid of power structures that can replicate heteronormativity and oppression, and similarly Stardust cautions against the presentation of commercial sex work as a “queer feminist utopia” (Stardust, 2015, p. 68). Jakobsen (1998) also urges scholars to think about queer as a verb- something to be done (p. 516). In this way, queering becomes a “deconstructive practice” (N. Sullivan, 2003, p. 50 and, perhaps, more method than methodology. Sullivan asks us to view deconstruction not as annihilation of what already exists but, instead, to critically analyse systems, terms, and norms (2003, p. 51). In this way, “queer social research methods question the origins and effects of concepts and categories rather than reify them in an allegedly generalizable variable-oriented paradigm” (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016, p.16), because these categories do not always align with lived experiences. By rejecting the limitations of the “hypothetico-deductive model” favoured by the natural sciences, we can indeed “embrace multiplicity, misalignments, and silences” (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016, p. 17).

For some final thoughts on the use of queer theory, I include Connell, who writes:

However dedicated I am to queering my own life ... I had forgotten to queer my research. This is easy to do, given the disciplining power of traditional methods, which urge us to take ourselves—our identities, our politics, our feelings—out of the research process and to avoid confusion and ambiguity at all costs. (2018, p. 132).

Closing her essay, Connell (2018) urges queer researchers to embrace the productive potential of failure and to keep fighting in the face of uncertainty, vulnerability, and pain. Similarly, Ward closes her chapter in the same book with a rousing call for queer scholars in sociology to “bring on your interdisciplinary/promiscuous methods, multiple/polyamorous methods, ambiguous/gender-queer methods, unpredictable/moving methods, and your nonreproducible methods. The discipline needs you” (Ward, 2018, p. 65).

It is with these calls to action and through this lens, and my positionality as a queer, feminist, sex worker researcher that I aim to move through this project using the work of scholars who have furthered Bourdieu’s (1977) work to combine it with a visual research method as a novel approach.

Identity and identity work

At its core, this thesis is about identity. The concept of identity is broad, complex, nuanced, and debated. Identity is shifting rather than fixed, reactive rather than impenetrable, and connected to

our embodied selves. Identities can, arguably, be teased apart to relate to the different parts of ourselves, in a form of identity politics (a popular political tool used to separate and categorise issues and rights based on the groups that they apply to (Phelan, 1989). Sexuality scholars, Jackson and Scott (2010), argue that:

narratives of the self are something we actively construct through accessing certain discourses and narrative structures existing within our culture, the notion that subjectivity, indeed the very idea that we are individual subjects, is discursively constructed. (p. 217)

Using a Bourdesian lens to understand identity aligns this thesis with the tradition of constructionist approaches – the idea that identity is developed over time, rather than fixed at birth. Indeed gender, sexuality, and many other elements that make up our overall identities, rather than being completely predetermined, are constructed by the individual within the constraints of their social surroundings. In late modernity, identity, identity work and identity management are more prominent than in any other time in human history. Identity work can be understood as the conscious establishment and maintenance of a cohesive sense of self (Beech et al., 2016) – the answering of the question, “who am I?” This modern phenomenon appears in our self-written social media bios (short for biographies) and timelines⁵ (Lincoln & Robards, 2017), in the plethora of online personality tests (such as the Myer’s Briggs Type Indicator) and in our constant search for categorisation (astrology signs, racial categories, and the explosion of emerging sexuality and gender categories, to name a few examples). As we search to answer the question of *who* we are, sociologists, including social constructionists, are concerned with the *why* of our identity (de Beauvoir, 1949/1988; Butler, 1997). As humans, we seek to define ourselves because we make meaning from the world with comparisons; us versus them, here versus there, my “citizenship” versus his “refugee status”. Whilst in contemporary times, we are arguably freer to self-identify than ever before, and our modern life encourages us to do so (from Tinder⁶ bios to fashion branding), the choices available to us are dependent on a multitude of concrete factors. Race, socio-economic status (and the connected class structure), and (dis)ability are largely indisputable in that we are born into bodies and social structures that define us before we can choose. Other elements of our identity are more malleable.

⁵ Facebook’s term for the list view of posts on a user’s account.

⁶ A dating app popular at the time of writing this thesis.

Bourdieu's theory of habitus underpins his constructionist stance in identity theories. Whilst Bourdieu has a fascination with power, my work is less about power and more about connection; our human need for belonging rather than hierarchy, power and, domination. In explaining habitus, Bourdieu (1993) links it to the word, "habit", but separates them by stating that:

The habitus, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions. So the term constantly reminds us that it refers to something historical, linked to individual history, and that it belongs to a genetic mode of thought, as opposed to essentialist modes of thought (like the notion of competence which is part of the Chomskian *lexis*). Moreover, by habitus the Scholastics also meant something like a property, a capital. And indeed, the habitus is a capital, but one which, because it is embodied, appears as innate. (p. 86).

For Bourdieu, the question of what makes up an individual is not one of the binary options of internal "truth" or the product of external factors (the nature versus nurture debate), but rather a combination of the two. Bourdieu's understanding of habitus as being mostly formed during childhood will be critically examined below. According to Bourdieu, we define ourselves in relation to others. Our identities then, rely on defining what we are not, to understand what we are. For example, on taste, he stated that it "is first and foremost distaste, disgust and visceral intolerance of the taste of others" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 56). Bourdieu's deliberate use of the word "habit" within habitus is partly to denote the way our habitus is unconscious and reactionary to social stimuli. I argue that lesbian sex workers are, in fact, extremely conscious of the "rules of the game" in which they play, and both their success and failure within it. This differentiates lesbian sex workers from Bourdieu's agents (discussed later), however, I argue that in late modernity, all agents are experiencing an increase in reflexive engagement with our own identities. Particularly with the rise of the use of social media where the first step to registering an account is often creating a publicly visible bio, conscious identity work (or the question, who am I?) has become a part of everyday life (Sweetman, 2003).

I argue that it is because of the way sex work deviates from these norms, that sex workers are required to perform extensive identity work. This is grounded in my methodological understandings that, as well as being complex, identity is constantly evolving and developing, it is a journey that does not have a final destination where it can be concretely defined. Identity is contextual, and dependent on social, geographical, cultural, and political landscapes (Bourdieu's *fields* (1977), refuting the idea of fixed categories, inner essence or biological essentialism. Sexual identity, then, is not made up only of sexual practice or only of desire, it is multifaceted, cultural, temporal and relative.

Bourdieu's theories on identity

Bourdieu's (1977) theory positions the individual (the habitus) within their surroundings (the field), and argues that the habitus must learn an acceptable disposition to successfully move around the field. This could be explained as developing a "practical mastery of the world" (A. Green, 2008, p. 606). Bourdieu (year) posited that identity, rather than being predetermined or innate, is made up of learning what we need to do to successfully negotiate the social situations we experience (fields). How successful we are at this is dependent on how much capital we have. As we move about different fields, we add to our habitus (our knowledge of successful strategies) in a cumulative process. In Bourdieu's words:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53)

The habitus, Bourdieu (1977) asserts, is a durable (but not concrete) disposition that begins to construct itself at birth and continues throughout childhood, with new layers accumulating over time when one enters a new field (for example, a new career or exposure to a different social class). McNay (1999) explains, "the habitus is not to be conceived as a principle of determination but as a *generative* structure" (p. 100), and Huppertz (2012) adds, "the habitus is the internalisation of certain structures and histories" (p. 9). This separates Bourdieu's theory of habitus from theories of Foucault's discipline (McNay, 1999). Bourdieu's habitus and field recognise the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the embodied individual and its surroundings. The habitus is a reflexive temporal figure, constantly adapting and moving through the external social structures (fields) which, in turn, affect the habitus itself. Furthering the distance between Foucault and Bourdieu, the habitus, whilst constrained by the structures of the field, is an individual system of dispositions and history (Huppertz, 2012) and these group norms become "potentialities" (McNay, 1999, p. 101). Bourdieu recognises that the habitus carries with it deeply entrenched norms, and these are not easily reshaped or escaped with reflexive thought (McNay, 1999, p. 103). Although other theorists have posited similar models to explain constructed identity, McNay (1999) points to an "overemphasis on the emancipatory expressive possibilities thrown up in late capitalism" (p. 98) in her critique of the theories proposed by Foucault (1977) and continued by Giddens (1992). For McNay (1999), Bourdieu's work becomes relevant for feminist scholars because of the "incorporation of the social into the corporeal", and because

gender can be understood as an “entrenched but not unsurpassable boundary” (p. 99). Bourdieu’s theory of habitus recognises the impact of social powers on the embodied experience of the individual. Given my work looks at identity experiences of women who work in the sex industry (which almost always involves an embodied sexual experience), Bourdieu’s emphasis on embodiment and the corporeal allows me to look for the ways that identity is inexorably linked to the physical body.

Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice

Bourdieu’s (1977) Theory of Practice explained that we have both personal agency, and structural limitations when making choices about our lives. The individual exists in these fields not as blank slates with endless choices on how to behave, but as agents possessing qualities such as class and race (socially constructed structures) which dictate the choices available to engage in any given field. Bourdieu (1977) called these pre-existing qualities “the habitus”. He used his theory of practice to understand disparity in “tastes” between the upper, lower, and middle classes, arguing that the tastes of an individual are somewhat predetermined by the social class that they inhabit (the habitus). The qualities possessed by the habitus decide how much capital an individual possesses for use within each field. Capital (a form of power) exists in multiple forms – economic, social, and cultural – and this affects the choices an individual can make within each field. Critiques of Bourdieu’s theory of practice have centred on his lack of inquiry into the way gender, sex and sexuality influence the habitus, however, some sociologists have expanded Bourdieu’s original forms of capital to include other forms to rectify this issue (for example, McCall, 1992). Skeggs (2004b) begins the critique of Bourdieu’s original theory by stating that:

Bourdieu’s terribly well organized habitus cannot encompass all the practices between gender and sexuality, the contradictions, plays, experimentations, swappings, ambiguities and passings both within gender and between gender and sexuality (which, of course, are always informed by class, race and age). (p. 27)

Skeggs’ (2004b) critique establishes a need for innovation when applying Bourdieu’s social theory to the participants in this study whose sexuality, gender, and work are prominent due to their deviance from the norm. Understanding the experience of lesbian sex workers cannot be untangled from their sexual and professional identities, and Bourdieu’s theory does not go far enough in terms of gender, sex, and sexuality to adequately understand this. I argue that lesbian and queer sex workers consciously understand this deviance due to the vast differences in fields that their habitus exists within. Women working in the sex industry deviate from society’s

expectations of the ways in which women should perform sexuality (discussed in Chapter Two in relation to stigma). Again, queer women sex workers deviate from expectations of them set by the queer community by performing a version of economic heterosexuality, challenging the understandings others have of queer women's sexual behaviour. This necessitates a higher level of conscious identity work that would otherwise occur. Here, queer sex workers embody Skeggs' "contradictions, plays, experimentations, swappings, ambiguities and passings" (2004b, p. 27). Lesbian and queer sex workers demonstrate high levels of cultural capital within the sex work and queer arenas, although this capital does not necessarily translate across to the other fields they inhabit (for example, civilian careers or family relationships) and, indeed, at times, capital in one field negates capital in another.

Bourdieu's *Le Sens pratique* (feel for the game)

The link between the embodied individual and social positioning is an important one for queer bodies, and for sex workers. Bodily experiences are, of course, interconnected with identity – arguably, identity is impossible to separate from the body – and embodied cultural capital is an important component of Bourdieu's (1977) work. Brooks (2010) succinctly situates Bourdieu's fields within the industry of sex work, or what she calls "desire industries":

Desire industries, such as strip clubs, can be viewed as fields where individuals struggle to accrue resources, while cultural and erotic capital is exchanged between dancers, workers, and customers. Dancers and workers gain monetary/cultural capital within social networks, while customers gain social rewards, such as validation of their masculinity, social bonding with friends, and a feeling of helping the dancers economically. (Brooks, 2010, p. 37)

Aside from the delicious word play offered by Bourdieu's "feel for the game" (1980/1990) in relation to work about the sex industry, Bourdieu's theory of practice provides an insightful structure to understand the sex worker participants in this study. As Simpson et al. (2016) state, "reinforced or modified by experience, the habitus is continually adjusted to the current context in ways that mean it is shaped by, and shapes, the dynamics of the field" (R. Simpson et al., 2016, p. X).

Bourdieu (1977) brackets off the field and highlights the separation of an individual's multiple interrelated, yet separate, identities. In this, the Theory of Practice acknowledges the bounds in which an identity can be both embodied and performed (the field). This makes Bourdieu's Theory of Practice a salient lens through which to analyse the identity experiences of women who work in the sex industry performing hetero-sex, whilst holding a personal sexuality that diverges from

heterosexuality. An opportunity arises in which we can examine the way a participant's habitus is continually adjusted in the process of learning the "feel for the game". Where Bourdieu states that "it is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know" (1980/1990, p. 69), I argue that, in the case of sex workers, and particularly non-heterosexual women sex workers servicing a heterosexual male market, the boundaries of knowledge of their own performance are dissolved. The "feel for the game", becomes a reflexive, conscious strategy for the habitus and, thus, participation in this game leads to critical awareness about their possessed capital.

Furthering habitus, field, and capital

What makes Bourdieu's (1977) analysis appealing is his recognition of multiple forms of capital, and the way that they are culturally (re)produced. Rather than a focus on economic determinism, Bourdieu's model of habitus is influenced by alternative – yet equally potent – forms of capital. Scholars have taken Bourdieu's concept of social and cultural capital (embodied in the habitus) that focusses on class (Huppatz, 2012), and identified more specific models of capital. As Huppatz clearly states, "any feminist appropriation of Bourdieu must necessarily also move beyond Bourdieu" (2012, p. 30). I now explore the concepts of gender capital (Huppatz, 2012), erotic capital (Hakim, 2011) or the erotic habitus (A Green, 2008), gay capital (Morris, 2017), and the sex work field (Stoebenau, 2009). This scholarship that extends Bourdieu's concepts foreshadows my own extension of Bourdieu's work, presented in Chapter Four.

Gender capital

Despite addressing the gendered habitus in his later work, Bourdieu has been accused of being gender blind in the majority of his work (Skeggs, 2004b). In this later work, *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu (1998/2001) presents a binary gendered habitus, explaining that both the male and female habitus exist in relation to each other and continue to tell us what is and isn't "for us", similar to other identity categories of the habitus. Because of Bourdieu's perceived failings to properly address gender, and, indeed, women as subject rather than object (Huppatz, 2012), feminist scholars have "appropriated" the theories of capital (Huppatz, 2012) to better explain the experience and social positioning of women. McCall (1992), for example, argues that gender dispositions are embodied, elusive and significant, meaning that gender, indeed, should qualify as a form of capital. Beverly Skeggs (2004b) continues that gender "can be a range of things; it can be a resource, a form of regulation, an embodied disposition and/or a symbolically legitimate form of

capital” (p. 24). For Huppatz, the concept of gender capital can include things that make up hegemonic femininity, such as emotion work, maintaining a “feminine” body and being read as female (2012, p. 27). Because of the gendered and power division between client and worker in the majority of the sex work industry, and the inherently gendered nature of relationships within the work, gender(ed) capital becomes a critical concept for my work.

Erotic capital or erotic habitus?

Further to Bourdieu’s theorising, Hakim (2010) expands the framework of capital to claim the existence of “erotic capital”, while Adam Green (2008), in contrast, discusses an “erotic habitus”. Whilst Hakim’s conceptualisation is interesting, it falls frustratingly short when explored through an intersectional queer lens. She lists seven factors of erotic capital: beauty (which is contextual); sex appeal (separate but linked to beauty, an element that can’t be captured in a still image); social (charm, grace, ability to flirt); liveliness (ability to dance, play sport, be energised); social presentation (adornments that depict wealth and status – Hakim stresses this as a skill); and sexual competence (energy, playfulness, skill at sex acts – this factor is not obvious to anyone but sexual partners so comes last in the list) (Hakim, 2010, p. 500-501). Hakim suggests that these factors impact on a person’s ability to gain other forms of capital, particularly economic. A concept comparable to Hakim’s erotic capital, “pretty privilege” (Carothers-Liske, 2022; Weisberg, 2022) is only just emerging in the literature, having evolved in online feminist discourse over recent years. A seventh element of Hakim’s (2010) model is fertility – the ability to bear healthy children. Hakim asserts that this is only relevant to women and is contextual, being less valued in a post-agricultural world.

Hakim’s (2010) biological essentialist claims about women’s (lack of) sex drive narrowly miss an accurate understanding of the social factors that inhibit women’s sex lives (particularly post child-bearing) and fail to recognise that women’s domination of erotic capital is inherently linked with their lack of desire to engage in behaviour such as extramarital affairs. Men in contemporary society possess lower erotic capital, particularly when it comes to the factors of social and sexual competence (Hakim, 2010). I argue that it is precisely *because* of the pressure women experience to be sexual (granting them higher erotic capital than men) due to their lack of other forms of capital (particularly economic) that leads to men, in turn, being excused from the pressure to develop sexual prowess, and, thus, (heterosexual) women turn to other life domains to experience pleasure and fulfillment. Women are taught from girlhood that their sexuality is a tool (erotic capital) and something that they owe the men in their lives, rather than something that they

should seek out for personal satisfaction and fulfillment (as men are taught) (Byers, 1996) Hakim comes frustratingly close to understanding this by presenting numerous data on the difference in sex drive between men and women. However, she fails to link her own theory of erotic capital with this phenomenon. She sums up by stating:

Even if men and women had identical levels of erotic capital, men's greater demand for sexual activity and erotic entertainment of all kinds at all ages automatically gives women an advantage due to the large imbalance in supply and demand in sexual markets. (p. 506)

I thoroughly disagree with this statement and, instead, recognise the "supply and demand" to be intrinsically linked to women's apparent lack of sexual desire. In other words, it is precisely *because* of the importance of erotic capital as a tool that women's magazines are filled with tips on how to give the best blowjobs, and which sexual positions are the most flattering for the female body. In comparison, advice about pleasuring the female body is almost completely absent from men's magazines and media (Porter et al. 2017).

In contrast, Adam Green (2013) is critical of Hakim's (2011) theory of erotic capital, stating that Hakim fails to contextualise erotic capital in Bourdieu's (1977) field theory more broadly. He proposes that we must all learn what is expected of us in the realms of gender and sexuality to then perform this gendered sexuality within different contexts (fields) (A. Green, 2008). Green argues that the fields (including structures such as race, class, and age), are completely absent from Hakim's work, yet are important to contextualise erotic capital. Green offers his own "sexual fields" approach as a replacement for Hakim's erotic capital thesis. For Green (2008), we therefore embody our own understandings of the expectations of our social role. This embodiment is constrained by structural issues, such as sex (the way that our physical genitals are understood in the context of our society, e.g., a vagina is regularly understood as female), race, ability, and physical body (Williams et al., 2016). To sum up his criticism of Hakim (2011), Green states that:

Despite purporting to advance a formulation of erotic capital that includes both sexual and non-sexual elements, Hakim's actual analysis of the power of erotic capital in women's lives boils down to sex appeal, and represents little more than a compilation of research and anecdotal vignettes concerning how heterosexual men's unrequited lust—the "male sex deficit"—can be used by sexy women to their advantage. (A. Green, 2013, 147).

Steering clear of Hakim's (2011) manifesto about women harnessing this inherent erotic power for their own collective liberation, some of the ideas of erotic capital remain sound and relevant to this thesis. Congruent with Green's (2013) statement that Hakim's (2010) seven categories of erotic capital are overstated and too generalised to be of real analytic worth, I instead focus on a

simplified version that includes beauty (pretty privilege) and sex appeal (perhaps combinable as physical/aesthetic characteristics), and the social (ability to flirt, inherently connected to the first factor). This is similar to what Green labels as “sexual capital”, however, his assertion that the theory fails due to the absence of link to social structures, such as class and race, is unnecessary. It is obvious that beauty, sex appeal and ability to flirt (linked to Hochschild's [1983] emotional labour) are entirely located within these sociological structures. One is then able to tie (part of) Hakim’s erotic capital back to Bourdieu’s field theory by recognising that context is entirely relevant, and this form of capital is not “portable” and achievable with practice; rather it is structured and reliant on temporal, cultural, and geographical factors. The work of Green and others who concentrate on the “sexual field” has been dismissed with the argument that sexuality is not a field in itself, but rather is present in all existing fields, and that the framework presented by Bourdieu needs little expanding (Wacquant & Akçaoğlu, 2017). I argue, however, that furthering Bourdieu’s concepts enables them to remain relevant in contemporary sexuality studies. Brooks (2010) situates the concept of erotic capital within the fields (and structures) of race and class, which resolves Green’s problems with Hakim’s theory of erotic capital, when discussing the field of sex work:

Desire industries, such as strip clubs, can be viewed as fields where individuals struggle to accrue resources, while cultural and erotic capital is exchanged between dancers, workers, and customers. Dancers and workers gain monetary/cultural capital within social networks, while customers gain social rewards, such as validation of their masculinity, social bonding with friends, and a feeling of helping the dancers economically. (Brooks, 2010, p. 52)

She illustrates how levels of erotic capital are always relative to particular categories of race and wider meanings associated with the sexualisation of an individual’s race. Through her ethnographic study, Brooks highlights the way that the hyper-sexualisation of Black women –and Women of Colour more broadly – leads to a decrease in their erotic capital (and, in turn, their earning power), and an increase in what is expected of them in terms of emotional and physical labour. She shows how dancers use their erotic capital to gain not only economic capital, but also cultural capital, by learning about language and cultural norms from clients (Brooks, 2010).

Gay capital

Morris (2017) uses the term “gay capital” to describe a phenomenon he finds in his work centred on gay men, masculinity, and class. Explaining his definition of the term, he states:

It applies to all aspects of the symbolic economy, gay capital is an umbrella term which describes the unique forms of cultural, social, and symbolic capital available to young gay men in gay-

friendly, post-gay social fields. In other words, cultural gay capital describes insider knowledge about gay cultures, social gay capital describes belonging to social groups which are exclusively or predominantly gay, and symbolic gay capital describes having one's gay identity recognized and legitimized as a form of social prestige by others. (Morris, 2017, p. 1199)

Here, Morris (2017) proposes that gay capital exists as a form of symbolic capital, entirely separate from heterosexual life, in the field of gay relationships. Access to this capital intersects with other identity markers, such as race, age, and class, and it is a tightly policed institution. Morris argues that gay capital can be cliquey and completely separate from straight life. He cites social capital naming practices (the naming of social groups creates a form of capital) as an example of gay capital.

Drawing on popular culture and social media ... —notably less elite forms of cultural capital than documented by Bourdieu (1984), suggesting that gay capital may queer traditional class boundaries—these participants did not reject gay cultures but ... used their friendships to develop their own local ways of “doing gayness.” Skeggs (2004b) highlights that gender normalcy is a form of symbolic capital that is the result of privilege accumulated in other areas of social life. Yet, this research demonstrates that the symbolic capital of masculine orthodoxy is highly context dependent. (Morris, 2017, p. 1200)

Morris's (2017) theory of gay capital is deemed salient by Ward (2003), who uses Bourdieu's understanding of taste and class to discuss the way that the gay movement has been capitalised upon and has moved past the prioritisation of necessity (working class needs) towards the professional (middle class homonormativity). Whilst gay capital is a provocative concept, its field specificity may not translate to a contemporary Australian context. Central to Morris's (2017) findings is the idea that his particular field is “post gay” (Ghaziani, 2014), whereas a 2015 article exploring the contemporary Australian context “provide[s] only partial support for the post-gay hypothesis” (Lea et al., 2015). Therefore, gay capital is of limited use to the present study.

Sex work as a field

Stoebenau (2009) furthers Bourdieu to explain the nuanced and complex lives of sex workers in Madagascar. By positioning the sex industry in Antananarivo, Madagascar, as a field, she illuminates the impacts of different forms of capital – rather than just economic capital – on the decision making and risk management process in the lives of these women, whilst adding to the (largely Western) debate around lines between prostitution, sex work, and trafficking. Stoebenau (2009) shows how complex racial identities in Madagascar contribute to the habitus embodied by her participants (for instance, fashion likes and dislikes) which illustrates the importance of recognising more than just economic capital when designing health interventions. The focus of Stoebenau's work is understanding the economic and symbolic capital relative to this field of sex

work in Madagascar. Stobbenau (2009) rightly focuses on defining the habitus embodied by her participants relative to their cultural and racial status, and then positioning the capital embodied in those habitus within the singular field of sex work in Antananarivo to understand their health and wellbeing needs. Contrary to this approach, Huppatz (2012) aligns with Bourdieu's assertion that occupations themselves do not constitute fields. She continues that:

Although they may not be fields in themselves, different type of work have certain cultures and operate in certain environments and these cultures and environment can have a structuring effect on the habitus – they may even assist in creating fairly homogenous habituses in co-workers. (Huppatz, 2012, p. 15)

Understanding sex work as a field *is* important within my own research, as my focus is on the way that an individual moves across fields (sex work/heterosex, queer communities, queer sex worker communities, “private lives”) facilitated by their habitus. The unique way that sex work allows/necessitates workers to cross class lines makes a Bourdesian approach (rooted in class analysis) to sex work identity analysis all the more relevant.

Whore Capital

Aside from Huppatz's (2012) work on gender capital, Brook's (2010) exploration of erotic capital, and Stobenau's (2009) work on sex work as a field in itself, very few scholars have used Bourdieu's theory of practice to explore sex work and sex workers. One example, however, is a retrospective application of the theory to examine historical documents pertaining to the arrests and prosecution of “prostitutes” in the 1930s (Hansen, 2018). Of particular interest is the way that Hansen identifies that the “prostitute” subjects had developed a secondary habitus in which they display the “tricks of the trade” (p. 813). For Hansen, the sex working habitus doesn't only learn how to solicit potential clients, but also how to escape conviction by police and the court system. She concludes that, “the notion of habitus helps us understand the ways in which the women themselves actively and skilfully strived to control their trajectory” (Hansen, 2018, p. 821). Hansen excludes other elements of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, most notably that of capital, following Wacquant and Akçaoğlu's (2017) advice to decouple them.

Dirty workers

Finally, I consider whether the concept of dirty work can be adapted for use alongside Bourdieu. Treloar, Stardust, Cama and Kim (2021), in their study of sex work and stigma, reject Goffman's (2009) “spoiled identity” because it places the stigma as stemming from the individual as “both the source and location of stigma” (Treloar et al., 2021, p. 2). Instead, they turn to Mary Douglas

and her use of the terms “matter out of place,” disorder and risk (M. Douglas, 2002, p. 50). They point to the way Douglas is used in sex work literature in that:

people coming into contact with brothels (and sex workers) will be “polluted” by this association. The use of notions of pollution and contagion is used to denigrate those deemed to be “out of place” as well as contain a particular social order. (Treloar et al., 2021, p. 2)

Their focus seems to be on locating the source of stigma – which they claim is external and structural – rather than further discussion of identity more broadly. They continue:

Mental health practitioners may perceive that removal of the anomalous condition (sex work) will restore the individual to order and hence ameliorate mental health symptoms. The drive to remove sex work as an out of place attribute is consistent with the need to rescue sex workers. (Treloar et al., 2021, p. 5)

Simpson et al. describe their reasoning in using Bourdieu’s theories to understand dirty work:

Bourdieu therefore addresses individual and contextual issues in an integrated schema of mutual interdependence enabling an analysis of practices, experiences and job trajectories that focuses on individual choice and agency as well as on the significance of structure and institutions. (R. Simpson et al., 2016, p. 25-26)

Positioning sex work within the theory of dirty work, Bourdieu, indeed, offers a lens to combine the individual and contextual; a dichotomy which overshadows much of the existing sex work research thus far. Further, Theory of Practice (1977) offers a framework to unpack the rich multiplicity of experiences of performance, performativity, and identity in the lives of queer women who sell sexual services to a heterosexual male audience. Whilst there are arguments against expanding Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of capital past its initial three forms, the concepts of gender, gay, erotic, and whore capital provide a solid framework for this thesis to fill the gaps in Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice in the context of this study.

Ethical considerations

As a peer and feminist researcher concerned with equitable and purposeful research, I grappled with significant ethical tensions during the design and implementation of this research project. Sex workers are an over-researched population, and many call for the end of unnecessary research of this group (e.g., Jello, 2015). While the project was given conditional approval by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee on 22 October 2019 (see Appendix A), this was a slow process during which I was told the committee sought legal advice due to the “nature” of the study. A number of concerns were raised by the Ethics Committee. Firstly, the Committee was concerned that disclosing my status as a peer researcher brought reputational

risks to both the university and myself, thus, they requested that all references to peer status be removed from recruitment material. Given that my visible peer status was an integral part of my recruitment strategy, I did not comply with this request. I argued that while peer disclosure could be a risk (Stardust, 2020), this was mitigated by not publicly stating which area of the industry I had worked in (parts of the industry are legal in South Australia; erotic dancing, for example). Although policing is and was a pressing concern of sex workers in South Australia, the laws around commercial sex are confusing and mostly enforced via brothel raids (Briggs, 2019) and entrapment methods whereby a police officer will visit a brothel or private sex worker and attempt to solicit sex. I could find no evidence, anecdotal or otherwise, of a researcher being pursued by law enforcement. Furthermore, many people in South Australia are publicly “out” as sex workers (either past or current), including workers at SIN (South Australia Sex Industry Network) and other activists, without facing prosecution as a result. I used a similar argument to rebut the Committee’s related concern that choice “to participate in the research project in-person has the potential to be viewed by relevant authorities as an admission of criminal conduct” (Flinders University SBREC, personal communication, October 22, 2019). I reiterated to participants during the interview process that they needed to be aware of disclosing potentially identifiable information, such as well-known work names, including drawings of their tattoos in the dolls, and discussing interpersonal relationships in the industry and queer community. Despite this reminder for participants to be conscious of their anonymity, in a small number of transcriptions, I felt it appropriate to omit descriptions of events, names of fellow workers, and similar, to protect the anonymity of both participants and other community members.

Secondly, the Committee stated a concern that “there are risks of physical and sexual violence occurring at brothels, other sex work businesses, or other locations frequented by sex workers which equates to safety concerns for the researcher” (Flinders University SBREC, personal communication, October 22, 2019). This statement suggested an “othering” and stigmatisation of sex workers, sex buyers, and the sex industry in general. While not surprising, it highlights the misconceptions and prejudices held by Committee members and further motivated me to conduct this important research. Stardust (2020), as a peer researcher in the porn industry, sums up tensions between university and sex work ethics:

The thing is sex work is often positioned as a risky activity in itself. But in sexuality research, the sex is not the risk. The issues that repeatedly arise relate to participant value, community control, reflexive voice, unlearning privilege and owning up to mistakes. It’s about creating space, capacity development, managing burn out, maintaining accountability, and navigating a hostile

political climate. Those risks are constant, but being alert to them is necessary, and as they say in feminist porn, it's about the process not just the product. (Stardust, 2020, p. 35)

In my response to the Committee Chair, I outlined my experience in risk management as a social worker who regularly conducted solo home visits in the mental health system, and my skills in identifying and managing these risks. After originally planning to conduct interviews in workplaces (namely, brothels) because of the powerful space of the “girls room” (Lawless, 2018), the Committee’s concerns about anonymity and “criminal activity” meant that I had to change this aspect of the study. Other modifications in response to the Ethics Committee included the removal of recruitment of minors (seventeen-year-olds who are above the age of consent, as discussed below) and the addition of information regarding follow-up supports for participants.

When designing this research, the best practice guide by Elena Jeffreys (then President of Scarlett Alliance) was considered (E. Jeffreys, 2010). In her consultancy work with Southeast Asian sex workers, Jeffreys identified a number of ethical considerations of importance to participants. She found that participants wanted to know what would happen to their data (how it would be published) and what motivated the researcher to do the research. With this in mind, I spent significant time talking with participants about the aim of my research, the way data was likely to be presented, and my motivations behind completing the project. Sex workers also identified that they should be paid for their contribution (E. Jeffreys, 2010) and I successfully argued that the university needed to provide funding to pay sex worker participants adequately (\$80 per interview, which is similar to the average amount earned by a worker in an hour session in an Adelaide brothel). As Jello argues, direct benefit is of paramount importance:

How do you repay this help that we are giving you? You make your research matter to us. Since just doing the research doesn't help anyone but you, you need to do some extra work to make it useful to us. A direct benefit to sex workers is the necessary condition of doing research on sex work. Period. (Jello, 2015, para. 15)

In my research, direct benefit occurred in the financial reimbursement of time and the opportunity to take their completed craft activity home with them and/or present it to loved ones through the exhibition. As discussed below in methods, the participants chose the name that would be used to deidentify their contribution, and verbal consent was collected using these chosen names. No legal names or personal details were collected during the process, except in the few cases where I interviewed participants in their own homes, or if they chose to communicate through an identifiable email addresses. This means that, in the unlikely event that my data is subpoenaed,

the risk of criminalising evidence is low, similar to the methods used by Stardust (2020) in her auto-ethnographical study with porn producers.

Jarldorn's (2019) chapter on ethical considerations when using participatory methods was infinitely helpful in thinking through potential dilemmas with this project. As a researcher, and particularly in the recruitment stage of the study, I felt it important that I be a visible member of the sex work community, both in person and online. Recognising the powerful internal politics and boundary policing within the sex worker community, it was paramount that I was known to "insiders" such as SIN and its interstate counterpart organisations, and that I had a presence in sex worker only online spaces. My visible role as a sex work advocate (attending rallies and volunteering at SIN events, for example) ensures that my research is not seen as tokenistic or disengaged (or politically vacant), something Jeffreys warns sex work researchers of (E. Jeffreys, 2016). In addressing concerns about the creation of meaningful professional relationships with participants, Charmaz states that, "our allegiance to social science ethics, however uncertain and ambivalent, can take precedence over human relationships and caring. And that may be the greatest ethical error" (Charmaz 2002, p. 323). While no major ethical dilemmas arose during the recruitment or interview phase, this remained the centre of my focus.

Methods

Tensions exist amongst queer theory scholars as to whether you can use an established research method and still operate within queer theory (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016). As Love states:

From the start, queer scholars have acknowledged, and often celebrated, the messiness of their subject matter and have invented new modes of research, writing, and performance to deal with it. They have been slow to identify these new modes as methods because the term as it is generally understood is ill suited to address the vagaries of embodied life. (Love, 2016, p. 345)

Love remarks that even the phrase "queer methods" conjures up visions of "uptight *methods* attempting to impose order on the slovenly *queer*" (Love, 2016, p. 346). Consideration of this tension was partly responsible for my choice of semi-structured interviews combined with a craft activity to form a visual research method – noting that data is collected only from interviews, not from the visual art produced – rather than anything more prescriptive. My own experience as a lesbian sex worker grappling with what sometimes seemed to be incompatible identities drew me to using a visual research method for this project, similar to the experience of Oliveira and Vearey. Importantly, Oliveira and Vearey (2017) also state that "employing a participatory visual and narrative approach offered participants an important opportunity to represent themselves in ways

that traditional methods alone do not offer” (pp. 283-284). Visual research methods are purposefully anti-oppressive in that they enable a participant to express their experience without needing an extensive vocabulary or be well versed in the trending sociology lingo (Jarldorn, 2019)

Stevi Jackson (1993) argues for the importance of relationship building and shared meanings in research, and this is helpful in understanding the value of the collage activity as a means of establishing common ground in researcher-participant interactions. Jackson (1993) argues that because emotions are not observable, researchers can only come to understand the expression of emotion rather than the emotion itself. I argue that, similarly, identity is a felt experience; something that we can only hope to understand the expression or construction of. With this in mind, the paper dolls used as a method become a powerful medium for participants to visually represent and share their understandings of their identity/ies.

Semi structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the logical data collection strategy for a phenomenological study (Durdella, 2017) as this enabled me to guide the interview across broad themes, but also be led by the participant to allow for richness and accuracy of data. The interview questions (Appendix E) were designed to ensure that major themes were covered and, rather than reading them verbatim, I referred back to them as necessary. Interviews were conducted in hired office spaces at Flinders University in Adelaide and Melbourne Library, at a small number of participants' homes, and then later online over Zoom due to COVID-19 (the limitations of this is discussed below). Participants were given the option of interview location within Adelaide and a small number chose their own homes, but given the limitations of my transport in Melbourne, only the library space was offered. Despite all Adelaide interviewees being offered this choice, the participants who chose their own homes were all known to me in a personal capacity before the interview. Participants were advised that the interview would take between 60 and 90 minutes, and the majority of interviews were within this window with a handful coming in under the 60-minute mark. The relationships between myself (as researcher) and participants were of paramount importance to successful data collection, and these relationships were informed by my opening statements to participants. These included disclosure of my status as a sex worker, an explanation of the sections of the industry that I have participated in, and a recognition of the privilege I experience in these spaces as a white, cisgendered, educated woman. As part of the introduction to the interview, I explained that my own experience of thinking through my identity during my time in the industry, and struggling to find representation in the literature, had led me

to this PhD project. I encouraged participants to choose the name they are represented with in this project as it allows:

participants to represent their story with names they might not usually use but have always wanted to try on, names that people only in their communities know them by, names that bended and played with readers' assumptions about the speaker. (Hudson, 2014, p. 114)

Visual research methods

Visual research methods are an important way by which to promote rich, deep data, acting as a secondary mode of communication from participant to researcher, and researcher to audience. Hinthorne and Simpson Reeves (2015) identify three ways by which use of visual data in research – namely, photographs, drawings, and video footage – can be advantageous in data collection.

1. by prompting a greater degree of reflexivity – both by the researcher and the participant – than traditional techniques;
2. by encouraging participants to speak authoritatively about their lives and experience; and
3. by helping researchers and participants to negotiate cultural, linguistic, or other boundaries. (Hinthorne & Simpson Reeves, 2015, p. 158)

These benefits are compatible with my standpoint as an ethical researcher using queer theory, my phenomenological understanding of academic knowledge production (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), as well as my professional background as a social worker. There is a robust history of “art therapy” methods being used in social work practice to centre clients as the experts of their own lives (for examples used in feminist practice exploring the construction of gender identity, see Hogan, 1997). Art-based activities are useful as they busy the hands to shift focus away from a potentially confronting conversation between client and worker. There is a transferable impact when looking at researcher-participant exchanges. The therapeutic role of “play” is discussed by Gauntlett (2007) in his Lego project where participants use the toy bricks to construct models of their identity (p. 134)). Gauntlett’s work builds on Piaget’s (1954) ideas of constructivism; that we create our identities through engaging in their very construction. The paper doll collage activity used in this project lends itself nicely to this idea, as participants choose, add, and subtract layers of clothing and accessories (identity markers) while discussing their experiences and thoughts around identity. While symbolic interactionists recognise that language is the most important symbol we use to express our social life (Sarantakos, 2012 p. 43) clothing, mannerisms, makeup and perfume also become symbols used by workers to “perform heterosexuality” in the context of their work roles. Queer people use similar symbols to “perform” queerness for recognition from their communities (McDermott, 2006) and the paper dolls became the perfect vehicle to

communicate these other symbols in a visual way. Oliveira and Veary (2017) discuss potential advantages of visual methods, explaining that:

The mimetic re-telling of life stories in a visual form can validate the experiences of participants, and the artefacts produced (such as photographs, exhibitions, and narratives) can inform, educate, remind, challenge, and empower all involved, including future public audiences. (Oliveira & Vearey, 2017, p. 267).

As already discussed, an important ethical consideration in this project was the benefit to participants for being involved and having the product of the visual research method (the finished paper dolls) provided participants with something to show for their time and engagement. Further, displaying these dolls became an opportunity for participants to share and explain their realities more widely as a powerful way for the general public, policy makers, support services, and the sex worker community themselves to bridge the gaps in understanding of experiences that would otherwise be clandestine, hidden, and enveloped in shame. Smith, who used photo-elicitation in her work with sex workers, states that this method is “particularly useful for social phenomenon, such as sex work, that has a history of being researched in one-dimensional ways and where findings claim to speak for all individuals involved” (E. Smith, 2015, p. 247).

Moshoula Capous-Desyllas, a social worker who used feminist standpoint theory in her photovoice project with sex workers, sees visual research as an empowering process which can both contribute to consciousness raising of participants, as well as enable a deeper, more sound understanding of participants’ realities for the researcher (Capous-Desyllas, 2013). Although my project sits outside the realms of photovoice and participatory action research, it shares common goals and outcomes with these methods.

Lastly, identity is a profoundly abstract idea and, so, having a visual representation becomes an important prop, tool, or anchor to the interview. Oliveira and Vearey (2018) state that, “employing a participatory visual and narrative approach offered participants an important opportunity to represent themselves in ways that traditional methods alone do not offer” (pp. 283–284).

In their discussion of a research project very close to their hearts (migrant sex workers), Oliveira and Vearey (2018) disclose their positions as migrants, explaining that they wanted to develop a “research practice that engages with and recognizes our personal histories” (2018, p. 268). For the authors, visual methods became a way to honour their own experiences as well as those of their participants who became co-constructors of the data. They quote Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) when explaining that their decision to use participatory research was “a choice, which is both

personal and inherently political” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, as cited in Oliveira & Veary, 2018 p. 267). In this way, my position as a peer researcher using visual methods is inspired by Oliveira and Vearey’s work.

Audio data was recorded on a battery-operated Dictaphone and then transferred to my computer for transcription. Although I took a portable scanner to each interview so that I could scan the paper dolls if a participant chose to keep the original copy, only one participant did choose this, all other in-person interviewees left their paper dolls with me.

Paper Dolls

Choosing a visual research method which enabled participants to use craft to express and explore their identities was an integral part of “queering” the traditional research method of interviews. Participants were able to literally construct images of their multiple “selves” via the paper dolls, thus, becoming active agents, rather than passive subjects, in the research process. In this way, participants used their dolls to illustrate their embodied experience as both sex worker and lesbian/queer woman; identities constructed by adding the clothes and accessories to their blank forms. Visual research methods (used here in the form of paper dolls and an accompanying exhibition) are an appropriate method to use with sex workers who suffer from research fatigue (Kim & Jeffreys, 2013). Again, this method positions participants as the experts of their own experience which is very important given the history of writing about sex workers by outside “experts”. Early in the research design process, I was inspired by both the methods used by Pilcher (2012) in her work with strippers in the United States, and Jarldorn (2019) in research with formerly incarcerated people here on Kurna land (Adelaide, South Australia). Pilcher (2012), seeing ethnography as a feminist pursuit, used a variety of research methods including photo-elicitation in her work with queer erotic dancers. This occurred by Pilcher extensively photographing a dancer as she worked, and then discussing the photographs with the dancer in an interview, enabling researcher and participant “jointly to think about the meanings of her performances” (Pilcher, 2012, p. 128). Jarldorn (2019) again seeks research methods that are feminist and, as a self-identified radical social worker, states that photovoice is a democratic method of participatory action research in her work: “What makes Photovoice transformative is that it is a research method where participants enjoy and learn from participating and have a sense of ownership over the knowledge they create” (Jarldorn, 2019, p. 3). She speaks about the

transformative effect of her visual method on participants as a core foundation of her work (Jarldorn, 2019).

Initially, I had hoped to ask participants to take a photograph of themselves that resembles the paper doll, and to then layer this doll photograph with separate photographs taken of their clothing. It very quickly became clear that there would be no way to ensure confidentiality for participants if images of their actual bodies were collected. Participants were reminded during the activity that their dolls would potentially be on display in the future and they were free to make choices about including potentially identifying features such as tattoos, clothing styles, and so on.

Each participant was able to choose one of six doll figures, hand-drawn by my partner Rachel Hosking (Appendix H). Each figure came with a set of clothing, shoes, and hairstyles, and participants received two backdrops on which to position their doll-self. One backdrop represented a sex industry workplace complete with a chaise lounge and stripper pole, and the other backdrop imitated a dating app (Appendix H) to symbolise the way in which participants represent themselves to potential lovers and the queer community more generally. This background design was chosen because, as Ferris and Duguay (2020) found, queers use a range of symbols, including slang, shorthand language, and emoticons to communicate aspects of themselves on dating apps. Participants were encouraged, but not required, to create one doll on each background. The paper dolls became a supporting format of communication for the language that participants used to discuss their identities. Bourdieu's (1977) work on the role of the body in his theory of habitus allowed for an understanding of the way the body is an integral part of identity, not able to be separated from our "selves". The paper dolls became a vehicle for participants to visually represent the way the body relates to aspects of identity within Bourdieu's structure.

Many historical and contemporary craft projects created by queer artists also inspired the eventual use of the collage-style paper doll format. Indeed, there is a vibrant history of the use of paper doll sets in queer culture in America during the 20th century, including the work of Tom Tierney (Fox, 2014) which, although loved by mainstream audiences, included sets particularly aimed at a gay audience such as drag queens and leather-clad bikers (Frisch & Paskin, 2018). Phranc, the self-titled "Cardboard Cobbler", explores lesbian identity in both her songs (Douma, 1997) and her craft work. She uses imagery reminiscent of the paper dolls in large works (such as life-size floatation vests made of paper) as well as a more traditional small format in her work

titled *Jeanne Córdova Paper Doll Set*, recently re-exhibited to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots at the Leslie Lohmann gallery in New York (Weinberg, 2019). The work includes a figure of queer activist Jeanne Córdova and ten outfits with which to dress her (Appendix F). Another example by a queer artist was commissioned by the well-known lesbian blog site *Autostraddle.com* where images of queer celebrities (including Carrie Brownstein, Elliot Page, and Beth Ditto) are drawn along with their corresponding clothing and accessories and are available for the user to download from the website to print, cut out, and “dress up” themselves (see Appendix G; Lizz, 2013). As well as the creation and popularity of actual doll sets, a gay bar existed in San Francisco using the name *Paper Dolls* (Nestle, 1987; Martin & Lyon, 2003), and artists have continued the theme of using dolls to illustrate different layers of identity construction with clothing and accessories.

While some potential participants voiced concerns that the use of paper dolls may be misconstrued as portraying sex workers as fragile victims in need of protection, my intention in the use of them was to, instead, contribute to what I discovered to be a strong history of the use of paper dolls by lesbian artists and activists. The dolls also supported the ideas of identity as performative, layered, and temporal. Killen (2017), who writes about the use of photographs in projects of self-expression, argues that photographs are not necessarily accurate recordings but that “their meanings ever shifting and always produced in conversation with an imagined and actual audience. In this way, images are highly collaborative, a mixing of the experiences of photographer, subject and viewer” (Killen, 2017, p. 62). The same can be said for the paper dolls in that the layering of paper outfits and the colouring are efforts to portray something more than the image, initially to myself as researcher, but also with an imagined future audience of peers, family, lovers, and the public in mind. The paper dolls have potential as a meaningful archive of participants’ identities at a particular point in time. Indeed, Killen speaks to the power of visual media:

These new digital archives are so highly visual is important for illuminating the politics of untold stories of racial and gendered hierarchies. Although many online images appear staged and critiques of ‘selfie’ culture abound, the practices of including pictures in digital archives of queer life speaks to the centrality of performance to queer experience and the importance of visibility for constructing communities. (Killen, 2017, p. 69)

There is difficulty in discussing embodied experiences through words alone, and this influenced my decision to add a visual research method to my data collection. Similarly, Coy (2009) recognised this barrier and used participatory arts workshops in her research with sex workers. Coy writes:

Following this, the participatory arts workshops were developed to enable women to (re)present their lived experience of selling sex, in terms of embodiment and self-identity. Recognizing that 'exploring the connection between embodiment and disembodiment through talk is difficult' (Holland et al., 1994: 109), the aim was to engage women in dialogue about how selling sex affected their sense of self and relationship with the body and to (re)present these thoughts and feelings in visual form. (Coy, 2009, p. 65)

Recruitment

Due to the clandestine nature of the industry (B. Sullivan, 2010), changing laws that impact online spaces (Peterson et al., 2019), and isolated experiences of some areas of the industry (e.g., online workers), sex workers are a difficult group from which to recruit. Along with challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic (discussed below), recruitment of 20 participants took over five months. Initially titling the project "lesbian sex workers", I changed the language to include "queer" before beginning recruitment. This was due to my own personal understandings of the binary nature of gender and sexuality being shifted, along with the way I labelled my own sexual identity, and an understanding that the sexual identity category of "lesbian" ruled out potential participants who sat within the communities and experiences that I wanted to capture. As Stardust points out:

The fluid sexualities and practices of erotic performers confuse distinctions between 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual'. Many lesbian and queer-identifying women practice heterosexual sex at work in a way that 'interrupts many social assumptions about identity' (Thomas, 2006: 22). (Stardust, 2015, p. 75)

Finding no other way to describe sexual attraction, relationships, and community in an inclusive manner, I opted to use the term "queer" in recruitment materials. The identity labels and categories participants discussed will be presented in Chapter Five. As Lyons et al. (2014) outlined in their research:

The category of lesbian, for example, may not accurately capture how some women identify. Furthermore, asking about sexual identity at one time point does not capture the fluid character of sexual identity. Together, these limitations have the potential to misclassify and reduce our sample of lesbian and bisexual participants, likely biasing our associations towards the null. (Lyons et al., 2014, p. 1093)

An exploration of the shifting use of labels and identity politics (N. Sullivan, 2003) and the impact of this on my research will be more thoroughly discussed later. The research design process was informed by Jeffreys' (2010) guidelines on best practice and, thus, SIN (South Australia's Sex Industry Network) was consulted in the early stages of design. Initially, SIN also advertised the call for participants on their Facebook page, however, this was later removed due to concerns that their board had not been consulted, despite the General Manager endorsing the research. Scarlet

Alliance (the national peer support body for sex workers) posted the call for participants on their Facebook page and I also posted multiple times in sex worker only groups on Facebook, as well as on my personal Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter feeds. I created a Facebook page for the research, enabling prospective participants to contact me without engaging with my personal Facebook account. I approached several of my personal contacts, prominent members of sex work communities, to share my call for participants. A snowball sampling method (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) was intended, however, this approach saw limited success and most participants contacted me independently after seeing the poster (Appendix D) in an online setting. Whilst other researchers find snowball sampling an effective recruitment method (Rodriguez, 2022), many participants stated that they knew very few or no other sex workers who identified as lesbian or queer, and some said they didn't know any other sex workers at all. This may go some way to explaining lack of traction.

In total, 48 potential participants were sent information sheets. While a large proportion of these did not respond at all after receiving the information, a few responded stating that they did not meet the criteria, or that they had concerns about the research. One potential participant declined to participate, specifically because she had an undergraduate qualification in Fine Arts. She did not elaborate on this when asked for further feedback. Some potential participants expressed concern that the use of paper dolls aimed to infantilise participants or position sex workers as "fragile", as discussed above. Due to the vast majority of historical and current research about sex workers, indeed, presenting them as either subjects lacking in agency, helpless victims, or perverted criminals (E. Jeffreys, 2010), this is an understandable concern and, unfortunately, something I had not considered in the initial design. The limitations of this recruitment strategy were that potential participants needed to identify themselves as a sex worker and also have access to the parts of the sex work community in which my recruitment took place (these themes are discussed more thoroughly in the literature review). Participants also needed to have basic English literacy skills as the presence of an interpreter would further complicate the process of ensuring confidentiality.

Data analysis

I used a thematic analysis approach to analyse data in this project, guided by Braun and Clarke's (revised) model of six phases; familiarising with the data, generating codes, constructing themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Terry et al., 2017, p.23). The analysis of data began in the transcription phase as I transcribed all interviews

myself to protect the anonymity of participants. I kept a working document of emerging themes as they appeared and found this extremely helpful in the subsequent coding process and in engaging in a *reflexive* thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). *Nvivo* qualitative analysis computer software was then used to code the completed transcripts. Because these processes occurred concurrently, it became an immersive, reflexive experience where I regularly reviewed codes for salience and shuffled them into a more accurate structure as new interview transcript data were entered. Due to the extended interview period of five months, and the uncertainty and “anthropause” (Zhang, 2021, p. 457) that occurred in early 2020 due to COVID-19, I had time to discuss my work with peers and supervisors and jump between processes within this time period meaning that the work is reflexive, introspective and considered. During my entire PhD candidature (late 2016 to early 2023), I “came out” as a sex work researcher, and often also as a former sex worker, repeatedly whenever a new person asked about my thesis (at family gatherings, on dates, in professional contexts as a social worker), giving me an acute understanding of the pervasiveness of stigma directed at sex workers which, of course, aided my analysis of data.

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe latent content to mean “underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations” (p. 13) interpreted as meaning, rather than coding exact words. Given the varying vernacular used by participants, semantic content would have been largely ineffective and, so, latent content was coded. Braun and Clarke discuss the importance of locating oneself as a research- by explicitly outlining ones ‘underlying research values and assumptions; (Braun & Clarke 2019, p. 593). So to be clear at this point in the thesis; my understanding of knowledge is that it is ‘co-constructed’ (Letherby, 2003) and thus I used an inductive approach, without an aim to test an already existing hypothesis. Reflexive thematic analysis enabled me to challenge any preconceived ‘answers’ to my questions, often born out of my own lived experiences, and to stay open to surprising and unexpected themes that emerged through the data.

Exhibition of visual art

Once the data collection phase was complete, I planned and executed the exhibition of artworks as part of Feast Festival, Adelaide’s queer arts festival. The exhibition ran for the whole three weeks of Feast in 2021 in a queer bar that I run in the Adelaide CBD. All 39 paper dolls were framed and positioned with a few quotes that I had chosen to represent each participant. The

exhibition was well received, with a number of patrons thanking me for assisting them to consider queer and lesbian sex workers for the first time (Feast Festival, 2021).

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

I initially planned to complete 30 face-to-face interviews with sex workers based in Adelaide and Melbourne, and surrounding areas of both cities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I resubmitted my ethics application after my fourteenth in person interview to complete the remaining interviews via an online platform. This meant posting or emailing the paper dolls to participants and conducting interviews over Zoom (video conferencing software) whilst the participants did the craft activity in their own homes. The communication felt strange, halted, and like more of an effort over a screen (Bitti & Garotti, 2011). In previous interviews, I was able to gently prompt participants to engage in the craft activity by moving papers around or verbally commenting on the participants progress, but on screen, I was not even able to see how the craft was progressing, so that element was completely lost for me. Though participants still seemed to enjoy the activity, however, the experience of shared construction was not comparable to face-to-face interviews. The “hand-mind connection” seemed to be lost in communicating via screen. Despite clear instructions, one participant was not adequately prepared for the craft activity, meaning we could not discuss a comparison of two dolls as the activity was designed. None of the online participants completed the craft activity within the session time, and one took two weeks to send through the dolls after her interview. Because of the lack of control of the interview materials that I had as the interviewer through the online method, the visual method lost much of its power in increasing participant self-reflection and interviewer engagement.

An issue that Gauntlett (2007) describes in doing interviews is that “researchers expect people to explain immediately, in words, things which are difficult to explain immediately in words” (p. 3). This phenomenon may have been somewhat mitigated in the online interviews, because participants got the craft materials in advance so could start to form ideas about what they might say and do with them. There were also changes to the risk to confidentiality for some participants who did not have the anonymous money transferring app *Beemit* and, instead, agreed to be paid directly into their bank accounts. Others needed to disclose their postal address to receive the doll templates as they did not have access to a printer. On the other hand, moving interviews online meant that a participant who had previously shown interest in completing the interview, but wasn’t able to participate due to not being in either capital city, could eventually participate.

Although two out of five online interview participants were in Melbourne, the other three were located in other parts of Australia. One participant chose to keep her camera off, adding an element of anonymity which would not have been possible in person, aligning with Jenkins' (2010) finding that internet-based research methods can create options for participants. Another factor that potentially influenced participation in the late stages of data collection was the rapidly shifting landscape for sex workers with the industry closing down almost entirely during the COVID-19 restrictions.

Methodological limitations

Gauntlett (2007) discussed a limitation of verbal interviews, suggesting that participants, to an extent, perform for the researcher (also acknowledged by Buckingham, 1993), and whether this was heightened or lessened by my "insider" status as both a queer woman and a sex worker is largely hard to quantify. Along with the limitations of demographics of participants, as explored in Chapter Four, it must be stated that it is incredibly problematic and unnecessary to position a qualitative study as representative (G. Payne & Williams, 2005) and, therefore, this thesis does not profess to represent the experience of every queer or lesbian woman working in the sex industry. Whilst some scholars claim that studies lacking empirical data or relying on a subjectivist standpoint are less salient, Smith and Mac argue that:

The dependence on statistics in the prostitution debate is often a result of our invisibility, and our illegitimacy as commentators. Sex workers perhaps seem alien and mysterious, and the questions we raise too political; but numbers are reassuring, seemingly apolitical, and knowable. (M. Smith & Mac, 2018, p. 5)

In this study, purposive sampling and a small sample size is used to provide rich and deep data rather than generalisable information (Staller, 2021).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined both the methodology and methods used in this research process. Research needs to be purposeful, and social research – particularly social work research – should have activism at its core (Al Wazni, 2017). Among many other social scientists who have improved the world for queer people, I am inspired by the work of Evelyn Hooker, author of the journal article *The adjustment of the male overt homosexual* (1957), famed for setting the wheels in motion for the removal of homosexuality from the DSM-II (American Psychiatric Association, 1974). Hooker strongly believed that research could change society's understandings of people

previously seen as deviant and that this should be its main agenda (Minton, 2002). Her research didn't strive to pathologise or seek the "why" of homosexuality but, instead, to understand how gay men made sense of their worlds. It is this legacy of enquiry that I seek to continue with this project. Thinking about and trying to define our identities, or "who we are", has become a consuming project of late modernity that Giddens (1991) terms "the reflexive project of the self" (p.244). I argue that, in the Western context, sex workers, who play with alternative identities for work, and queers who are defined as "othered", sometimes reject categorisation altogether and may redefine themselves again and again due to shifting intimate relationships (Weeks et al., 2001, p. 12) and do more of this conscious identity work than the wider population. Women sitting at the intersection of both of these identities, therefore, occupy a site of layered and nuanced identity/s.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter opens with capsule biographies. The purpose of providing capsule biographies is to provide a brief vignette of each participant from the data collected during interviews (Dowsett, 1996). Although this chapter includes demographic data displayed in a table, it is impossible to paint a complete picture of an individual through this demographic data alone. Capsule biographies serve to fill in this gap and “flesh out” the character of individual participants, as previously used in sex worker research by Smith (E. Smith, 2016). Whilst, conventionally, we move from the broad to the detailed, I have chosen to invert this chapter due the importance of painting a holistic picture of participants as complex and diverse human beings. Participants chose their own pseudonyms; some chose to use names that they use within their sex work and others created entirely separate names or simply used an initial.

Capsule biographies

Demographic information, such as age and cultural background, was not intentionally asked of participants to preserve anonymity. Some demographic information was incidentally revealed during conversations, and this is provided in Table 1. As Stardust (2015) states:

The diverse, non-linear and non-conventional life narratives of erotic performers can be seen to present ways of being beyond normative trajectories of study, work, marriage, mortgage and retirement. We can see a kind of queer temporality in our sense of ‘stripper time’ (equating to flexible schedules/lateness), irregular income (or spending patterns), managing of multiple identities, varying working hours, building logical families (mentors/colleagues/communities), sex for money rather than procreation, balancing parenting responsibilities with erotic labour, and continuing to work through different sectors of the industry at various times in our lives. (p. 75)

In other words, the nature of the existence of queer sex workers in itself defies normative categories that can be neatly tabled and, thus, these capsule biographies give a fuller, and arguably more accurate, picture of participants – something often missing from quantitative research on queer sex workers. The capsule biographies were kept deliberately brief due to word count limitations and, rather than highlighting consistent demographics for each, I have attempted to pull relevant data to paint the pictures. I have chosen to include a key quote from participants as a snapshot into the (often comical) interview process.

Harmony

Harmony had been working for almost three years. She currently provided full-service sex work in brothels in Adelaide but had started her journey as a private full-service worker. For Harmony, being queer meant that she only had sexual attraction to men when it was paired with emotional connection, which never occurred in her work. She lived with a housemate who also met the recruitment criteria for this research. Harmony presented as confident and a skilled actress.

Harmony on her sexuality:

It's only happened a few times that I've actually been sexually attracted to a man like...There are just a few unicorns out there...

On how she manages to work with men:

I've always said there's no such thing as an ugly hundred dollar note.

E

E was 21 at the time of the interview and had been doing sex work in Adelaide out of her private residences since she was 16. E used sex work to supplement her welfare income and did not know any other sex workers, having always worked alone. She didn't identify with having a queer community but identified as queer because she rarely dated men. E presented as quite socially isolated and relished the chance to speak to someone about shared experiences through the interview.

E on how she managed to work with men as a lesbian:

I mean there's vegetarian chefs that cook meat so... So, it's just a job, yeh (laughs).

Paton

Paton and I originally met when I was a patron in her workplace (a strip club) and described my future research to her. Paton spoke of her time in the strip club (less than two years) as positive, enjoyable, and something she missed. Her interview, which occurred in her home, was high energy and, at times, she contradicted herself. She discussed the frustration of appearing "straight" and struggling to assert her lesbian identity, which she had only recently begun to unpack when she started stripping. Paton said that stripping for men gave her sexual energy which she very much enjoyed until a current female partner became uncomfortable with the job.

Paton on her experience of stripping for men:

At first, I was very like “ew they’re pigs and they’re disgusting” and then it kind of turned into something like a power source for me, and I really miss that to be honest. I really miss having that in my life cos I feel I don’t get that from women.

Chloe

Chloe had only been working for about four or five months at the time of interview, after running into financial trouble. Chloe was in her mid-thirties and had dated men exclusively until coming out as queer in her late twenties. She was known to me before the research, and the interview, held at her house in the company of her cats, was relaxed, reflective, and insightful. Chloe had had an overall positive experience working at a massage parlour which included good relationships with her predominantly straight work colleagues and management. She had not done full-service sex work. Chloe was out as a sex worker to people that she was dating, and had a few sex working friends, but was largely not out to her wider friendship circle or Italian family.

Chloe on how her lesbian friends gave her insider information when she was considering sex work as an option:

I approached some friends, a lesbian couple who are escorts, and basically said to them like, “run me down, I’ll pay you ... for your time and for your, for disclosing this information you know. I appreciate you’ve worked hard to get where you are and I don’t want to take advantage of that in any way”. So, and they were super lovely, they were like, “come over,” ... “happy to help you”. So, I went over and literally we sat down and one of them gave me like a pad of paper and a pen and was like, “right, ok”.

V

V predominantly worked “independently” in Adelaide, currently doing doubles strip shows and party bookings with her partner, April. V felt that she could be her true self during these bookings, and prioritised fun and enjoyment in her work (as well as money), but this did not translate to sexual pleasure. V also held down a government job and felt that this would be in jeopardy if her employer found out about her work. She also kept sex work and her sexuality a secret from her family. V was in her mid-twenties and had done a number of informal sex work jobs over the last four or so years. She said she liked the attention. She aspired to get a strip club position as a more solid financial option.

V on how authenticity is a part of her marketing strategy:

I used to try and have more of a work persona where it would be like, ok I’ll just switch off like I’m not really gonna be myself. I’m just gonna, like you know, do my thing and just leave it at that. But it’s kind of hard to maintain and it’s like I don’t want to go down that rabbit hole of like pretending to be someone I’m not ... I try to just be chill. I try to just have a good time and guys respond to that like they appreciate that.

April

April worked mostly with her partner V, doing online camming on *OnlyFans*, private and party strip shows, and topless waitressing. She positioned herself as a businesswoman and it was clear that she was committed to marketing and making the most money possible, while still having fun and enjoying her job. April had a day job in finance, was covered in tattoos, and had been working in sex work for about five years.

April on how dating within the sex industry is easier than dating a civ:

I couldn't imagine dating someone that wasn't in the industry, it would be, harder a lot harder. Cos we can just be like oh we both understand the point of view that its work, we are not interested in it.

On how she doesn't actively seek out friendships within the queer community:

I find that I don't identify with it as much cos I'm a bit more relaxed about everything, like I'm not I don't give a shit about going out and doing all these marches and whatever, like cos I am from a position of privilege I guess as well, which you know is probably something I need to self-reflect on ... but yeh, I just find that a lot of the stuff doesn't resonate with me as much as it does with people in the queer community.

Charlie

Charlie's career in sex work began when she was 18, and a university student, and had started doing sex party hosting with a boyfriend of the time. Charlie seemed to have really found her niche doing escorting, providing a girlfriend experience rather than more paid-by-the-hour type work. Now 23, Charlie was questioning whether this was a long-term career option for her.

Charlie on facing whorephobia from inside the queer community:

There's pockets in the queer community [where] I've got some really good friends who are super accepting of what I do for work and have seen me through lots of different stuff, and talked about it with me, and are interested because it's my work and it's my life, but not interested in the ... same way that people are interested in the, you know, bad stuff... But then there's also these pockets who are just like just like "well you can't be a true queer, if you're doing this then"...I think there's a lot of judgement there still, and I think people try really hard to say that the queer community is accepting, and of course it is, it's so accepting, but there's still so much toxic behaviour in that sense and ... sex workers are already fighting for so much. Like we shouldn't be having to fight for ourselves in a community that is all about acceptance.

Frankie

Frankie, a visual artist, was very clear about her work only being BDSM dominatrix, non-sexual contact. She was softly spoken, covered in tattoos, and spoke openly about her relationship and sexuality, chronic health conditions, and trauma. Frankie reflected a lot about her challenges in

finding community when her identity has shifted over the years. She currently identified as grey-aseexual.

Frankie on why foot-fetish work is her favourite aspect of the industry:

Some people hate their feet being touched... I couldn't care less ... If someone wants to sniff my feet and give me money, then like go for gold you know!

On what motivates her style choices outside of work

There's a part of me that wants people to be like, "she's not wearing make up!" you know, and want people to feel uncomfortable and questioned, you know, by my fatness in public, by my underarm hair, by my shaved hair, and lack of makeup. Like, I want people to be like, "hmmm I'm uncomfortable," and then sort of think, "why am I uncomfortable?"

Alexa

Alexa became distressed discussing a recent relationship breakdown with a man who had broken it off after she revealed her online camming work. Alexa was very young and appeared to have the least conviction to her sex work, trying to balance this with other work and study. At other times, Alexa seemed secure in her identity as a sex worker, speaking of it as a neutral inevitability for her life path. At times, though, when reflecting on the consequences of working in the sex industry, she seemed regretful.

Alexa on the difference between her two identities as visualised through the dolls:

But then, honestly, ... It's just like, just take the jeans and the hoodie off and then there's her... (laughs) It's the same person! She's just ... happens to be wearing matching underwear that day (laughs).

Elyse

Elyse had previously done full-service parlour work for about 10 years and she had just returned to the industry after a long break, hoping to find a better balance between work and her lifestyle. Elyse had worked in Queensland, Sydney, and Melbourne. She spoke about how class intersected with her identity as a non-heterosexual woman and her sex work career to make her feel most comfortable describing her identity as "femme". Elyse spoke about living as a lesbian separatist in the past, and showed a firm understanding of lesbian history, class politics, and anti-establishment sentiment.

Elyse on the way some parlours seek to solidify their high-class identity by providing grooming packs for their clientele:

It's all hocking your hole, like it doesn't matter where you're going.

On how she relates to younger sex workers who inhabit a more gentrified section of the industry:

I come from somewhere much more rural ... than a lot of people, and I didn't move to a big city, and I didn't move as soon as I was eighteen. Huge mistake. So, I think if I had've gotten there, where everyone else is now, a bit sooner, I wouldn't feel like, you know, like such a big pouty outsider.

Bella

Bella began her sex work journey by engaging with sugar daddies, moved on to agency full-service work, and currently worked privately as well as managing the admin of a few other workers – the only participant to speak of managing other sex workers in any way. Bella identified herself as “heteroflexible” and polyamorous, and had a non-binary AMAB partner and a girlfriend.

Bella on how polyamory interacts with her sex work:

I'm glad I'm poly cos I don't want to have to stop doing what I'm doing for work. And I think it would be unfair to be monogamous doing this kind of work, even though its different, it's not romantic I just think it would be unfair... like if I was saying to them, you can only have sex with me but, oh sorry, it's my work. I've gotta go fuck all these people, even though it's not enjoyable ... it's a bit rough, you know?

GG

GG was voluptuous with a husky voice and a self-assured presence. Now in her mid-twenties, she had worked for seven years, predominantly full-service in brothels. GG spoke about wanting to leave the industry but not having a clear financial exit plan in place. She had worked in health care and had encountered violent men in both industries which had led to a mistrust and hatred of men in general. GG was open with friends and lovers about her work, and felt that disclosing her sex worker status was a good way of weeding judgemental people out of her personal orbit.

On how she finds the sex industry to be accepting of her queerness:

When you're already marginalised, I think it can be easier and it's like it is, like things have definitely changed like significantly and ... we are living in a very lucky time to be queer. But it can still be difficult in everyday workplace and stuff, and I feel like the sex industry is a very accepting thing and it can be, it's an easier place to be just who you are because there's a huge amount of diversity and everyone's there for their own reasons, and I dunno, there's less judgement?'

Erin

Erin began survival work when she was kicked out of home at 15 years old in her regional hometown. She was in her late twenties, and she had worked both before her gender transition presenting as male, and after transition in a trans-specific brothel setting. At the time of the interview, Erin only engaged with one regular private client to provide a fetish service. With an undergraduate degree in sociology “hanging in her toilet”, Erin loved the craft project, seemed at

ease speaking about sex work in a peer setting, and identified the queer community, along with being a trade unionist, as very important to her sense of self. Erin had a girlfriend and many lesbian and queer sex worker friends. Our matching political tattoos created a space of political alignment, familiarity, and trust between us.

Erin on the progression of her understanding of her own trans identity and how it correlated with her sex work;

It sort of took another bout of like being a rent boy, in like in brothel circumstances, for me to go “oh that’s what I hate about men” ... I fucking hate like, like I hate their bodies, I hate the way they smell, I hate that my body looks like a man’s body, I hate all of these things, I hate everything that intersects.

On a common dynamic of being a trans woman working with male sex buyers:

I’ve had guys twice in one week come in and insist that they’re going to whisk me away and like let me ride in their boat and marry me and like as soon as their “bitch wife” is out of their life. Which I think maybe that also comes down to the idea that like heterosexual men of a certain age consider trans women less trouble because they’re less desirable to other men.

Ava

Ava had worked in brothels in Western Australia and Victoria, and had begun as a private worker doing doubles with her then girlfriend. Ava now works in social supports for sex workers after finishing her five-year sex work career. Ava explained her sexuality as queer in that she wouldn’t have a relationship with a man but would have sex with one if the right opportunity presented itself. Ava talked about the value in finding peers, even after she finished working in the sex industry, as a way to understand her experiences.

On how her sex work impacted her attraction to men:

I didn’t have the luxury of finding one of those really queer friendly or queer dominant brothels that everyone talks about now where like pit hair is cool ... that wasn’t the scene that I was in... I was one of the only queer women and I was always fascinated by the women I’d work with who would go home to their cis male partners at the end of the night, and I’m like ... how can you even look at another dick?

Cassie

Cassie identified herself as a “dancer” and had only ever worked in no-contact strip clubs. She started stripping to earn money as a student wanting to travel, and ended up staying in the industry much longer than she anticipated. Cassie was not working at the time of the interview and kept her private life and stripping history very separate. Cassie appeared confident, highly educated, and well spoken. Cassie was introduced to her current partner M, when M came into her workplace with mutual friends, and they have been together ever since.

On how the level of body work she undertook decreased in her day-to-day life when she was working in the strip club:

When I was at uni, I used to wear like, like I'd do my makeup for forty minutes to go to a lecture! And that was just out the window. I think in a way Cassie, or my dance persona, helped me refine myself more. I know who I am more, [to] be less apologetic for who I am.

M

M was Cassie's partner and had worked as a stripper at only one club for about four years. She was the most typically masculine of all participants, and there was a slight language barrier at times, with communication further inhibited by the interview being online. M entered the industry after seeing how much money her girlfriend made, and had never had a sexual relationship with a man outside of work. M was born and raised in a Southeast Asian country and emotionally recounted the experience of coming out to her mother as a lesbian, and the cultural barriers to acceptance she faced for her sexuality.

M on the first time meeting her now partner:

I get in and dress up because it's like a Halloween day, I dress up, put the like, I dunno, paint my face. And in that time like my partner she worked there, and she on the stage and the MC, he just asked someone to get up, you know, on the stage to get a free lap dance. And my partner just point at me like that. I want that hot girl... and that was me wearing like a ghost (costume) in the club and no one wear that, only me.

Lucia

Lucia had begun stripping in New Zealand and was currently working in Melbourne (pre-COVID-19) in the same club she had worked at for four and a half years. Lucia was the only online interviewee who chose not to have her camera on, which aligned with her being probably the most secretive of all participants about her sex work in her life. Lucia was born and raised in Peru and her conservative Catholic family does not know about her lesbian sexuality – they believe queerness to be a mental illness requiring treatment – let alone her time in the sex industry. Lucia much preferred her time working in non-touching strip clubs.

Lucia on her general experience of stripping:

I mean I have bad days, as I told you before, but I, I could deal with it and I like the industry. I mean at the end it's like any other job. You always have your upside downs.

Sasha

Sasha had worked in Adelaide as a stripper for three years, as well as being a member of dance and performance communities. Sasha had been out of the industry for a year at the time of the interview. She described her sexuality as “queer” which, for her, meant there was a possibility of attraction to anyone who was not a straight, cisgender man. Sasha said that spirituality and taking care of her mental health were important to her. Femme invisibility and the struggles of being a femme appearing lesbian was a continuous topic of our conversation.

Sasha on how she explains the prevalence of women-on-women relationships in the strip club:

It's that familiarity and it's that trust and love I feel like a lot of the girls ... you know have their experience with girls who are in the industry because we understand each other.

Amy

Amy started with BDSM work in her mid-twenties, then moved on to full-service brothel work, but now mainly relied on private bookings. Amy was currently working in the sex industry (pre-COVID-19) part-time around other interests and had a girlfriend, but also identified as polyamorous and was open to bisexuality, although the majority of her adult relationships were with women. Amy had been working for around seven years and was in her early thirties.

Amy on the difference between the Sydney scene compared to the queerness present in her experience of Melbourne brothels:

The culture there was very like het, like it was funny. I think in Melbourne all anyone wanted was a double you know, oh like “oh we will get to do a double together, it'll be so hot” and in Sydney I'd be like “oh I don't do doubles cos I'm not like that” cos you didn't want anyone else thinking you were.

Lola

Lola started stripping to support herself as a rural university student whose parents could not afford to supplement her study. She had danced in Canberra, and Sydney where she now resides. Lola was bubbly, politically self-aware, and humble about her privilege in relation to the whorearchy. Lola was in her early twenties and was only just coming to terms with her sexuality which she described as “gay”, after dating men exclusively in the past. She had successfully surrounded herself with queer women and stated that these platonic friendships currently fulfilled her intimacy needs.

Lola spoke about disclosing her stripper status on her dating profile when she was only looking for sexual experimentation, but removing it now that she is considering relationships with women:

I just thought like some people ... would see that on my profile as it is now and immediately like think that I'm like, really promiscuous, or like not really gay. ...I definitely have had people say to me like, oh well you're not really gay cos like you're a stripper and you interact with men, and it's like, mm, no, (laughs) I'm pretty sure.

Participant demographics

Table 1
Participant demographic information

Name	Age	Location	Areas of work	Sexuality	Time in sex industry	Currently working?	Cultural background
Harmony	-	Adel	Brothels and private full service	Queer	3 years	Y	-
E	21	Adel	Private full-service work	Queer	5 years	Y	-
Paton	24	Adel	Stripping	Gay/Lesbian	< 2 years	N	Catholic, first gen German-Scottish.
Chloe	31	Adel	Erotic massage	Queer	4-5 months	Y	Italian
V	Early 20s	Adel	Buck's shows, online web camming, topless waitressing, lesbian shows (inc. oral and manual sex), online porn, sugar baby	Lesbian	Approx 4 years on and off (with a 'day job').	Y	Greek
April	-	Adel	Online porn/cam girl party bookings, topless waitressing	Queer/lesbian	5 years	Y	-
Charlie	23	Adel	Escorting, events, sex party hostess, online, outcall private work, online content creation	Queer	5 years	Y	-
Frankie	-	Adel	Online domination, previously cam work, foot fetish.	Grey Asexual	-	Y	-
Alexa	21	Adel	Online porn/cam girl	Bisexual	< 2 years	Y	White Aus
Elyse	Mid 30s	Melb	Full-service parlour work, some BDSM and private	Queer/Lesbian/ Bisexual/High femme	> 10 years as main income	Y	-
Bella	-	Melb	Brothel, agency, private escorting, porn	Heteroflexible	-	Y	White Aus
GG	25	Melb	Mostly full-service brothel	Gay/Lesbian	7 years	Y	-
Erin	Mid 20s	Melb	Street, Brothel, Private	Lesbian	10 years, on and off	Y	White Aus
Ava	32	Melb, prev. WA	Brothel, private duo	Queer/pansexual	5 years	N	-
Cassie	-	-	Stripping	Lesbian	4 years	N	Chinese
M	-	-	Stripping	Non-Binary	3 years	N	Thai
Lucia	-	- (prev Melb)	Stripping	Lesbian	5 years	Y	Peruvian
Sasha	Late 20s	Melb	Stripping	Queer	3 years	N	White New Zealander
Amy	Early 30s	Melb	Peep shows, massage, domination, brothel, private escorting	Homoflexible/Gay/ Dyke/Bisexual	7 years full-service, longer in other areas	Y	White Aus
Lola	Early 20s	Sydney	Stripping	Gay/lesbian	1+ year	Y	White Aus

The above table illustrates the futility of trying to squash complex identities into a few identity-marker boxes. The premise of qualitative research is that people, lives, and situations cannot be understood simply by numbers or categories, but that we are always shifting, evolving, and hard to categorise. Nonetheless, the table is to give a sweeping overview of participants' background information. Paired with the capsule biographies, it aims to paint a picture of these women to be fleshed out further in chapters Five, Six, and Seven, where I examine the data in detail.

In the column "sexuality", I have listed the words that people used to describe themselves in the present tense, as most participants used other words to label their past selves. The order in which they are listed does not reflect how insistent people were with a particular label, or how strongly or deeply they identified with it, as this is impossible to glean from the interview data. Even when I asked participants to choose a word, most used more than one and then went on to describe what those words meant for them. I will show in Chapter Five that understandings of sexual (and gender) identity are much more complex than can be demonstrated by a few words in a table.

The column "Areas of work" lists the different sections of the sex industry that participants identified they had worked in. For a brief description of each category, refer to the notes on terminology in the preliminary section of this thesis. This column illustrates that it is common for sex workers to work across different areas of the industry, however, stripping tends to be a standalone experience. This separation of strippers from other sections of the industry may be explained by it being the only legal form of work for South Australian workers. Stripping also sits closer to the top of the whorearchy, and this may explain why participants did not venture down the whorearchy into other sections of the industry. The "currently working" column does not account for participants who were unable to work due to COVID-19 restrictions at the time of data collection; rather, it shows participants' own identification as "current sex worker" or "past sex worker". The large number of participants who chose to be a part of the study, even though they are not currently working in the sex industry, points to the enduring stigma and identity of sex work, as discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Four.

Sample

Initially, I set out to interview 30 participants for this project, however, 20 interviews were eventually conducted with a combined 1,223 minutes of recorded data. With consideration of the "conceptual depth" needed to claim saturation (Nelson, 2017, p. 555) it was agreed by myself and

my supervisors at this point that, as well as reaching a level of repetition, data also satisfied Nelson's (2017) criteria for saturation:

1. A wide range of evidence can be drawn from the data to illustrate the concepts.
2. The concepts must be demonstrably part of a rich network of concepts and themes in the data within which there are complex connections.
3. Subtlety in the concepts is understood by the researcher and used constructively to articulate the richness in its meaning.
4. The concepts have resonance with existing literature in the area being investigated.
5. The concepts, as part of a wider analytic story, stand up to testing for external validity. (Nelson, 2017, p. 559)

Although many of these subsets, or characteristic themes, of participants will be discussed further in relevant chapters, I have provided a snapshot of individual demographics within the table above. Because I did not ask participants for demographic information (aside from which areas of the industry they had worked in), these data are drawn from what was willingly and organically disclosed during interviews. Of the total participant group ($n=20$), 15 participants were currently working in the industry and 5 identified as past workers; 14 had worked in the industry for more than two years, 4 for less than two years, 2 did not specify; 19 identified their gender as female or woman (although two said they were currently questioning their gender identities), and 1 identified as transgender (AMAB).

M, whose first language was not English, described herself as a woman, but her sexuality as non-binary. The lack of transgender participants may be explained by my own status as a cisgender researcher, but also by trans workers feeling "over-researched". The lack of gender identity variation in this study is important because "people's gender shapes their route into sex work, their experiences while selling sex, and their lives beyond" (M. Smith & Mac, 2018, p. 4). The differences in experiences between the one transgender participant (Erin) and the 19 cisgender participants cannot be understated, although of course we cannot extrapolate the experiences of one participant to be representative of a population. Erin was the only worker who identified that she had engaged in street/transaction/survival sex work, and she had then gone on to work in "transgender specific" brothels. She described this experience very differently to other brothel workers.

Many participants had worked in multiple sections of the industry, and altogether covered most areas of the industry. All types of sex work denoted in Harcourt and Donovan's (2005) typology of sex work existing in Australia were represented, however, given that this typology is over fifteen

years old, and the research was conducted by civilian researchers, I am cautious in viewing it as an exhaustive list. The changing face of the sex industry due to legislative boundaries and the progression of technology, thus, informing limitations of this research will be discussed further in the concluding chapter. Areas of the industry that participants reported to have engaged in as workers are listed below.

- Online/camming/porn/social media work
- Stripping/exotic dancing
- Party bookings/live shows
- Full-service brothel work
- Erotic massage
- BDSM work (online and in person)
- Private full-service bookings/escorting
- Sugar babying
- Street work/transactional sex work

I wish to be clear about the limitations of the demographics of participants. Only one participant identified that she had done “street” sex work or survival sex work (sometimes called “outdoor” sex work). Street sex workers are the most marginalised workers (Leaker & Dunk-West, 2011) and may not be engaged with the online sex worker community (where my research was advertised) or even identify as sex workers. Street sex workers only make up a small fraction of the industry in Australia (SIN estimates there to be around 30 active street workers in SA [Starke, 2014]) and I did not overtly attempt to engage with this community. The experiences of street sex workers in Australia seem to have notable differences to experiences of indoor workers, including the presence of pimp-like men, drug dependency that necessitates the work, and frequent violence (Harris et al., 2010). It fits, then, with this increased level of risk, that this is a hard-to-reach population who are at the same time over-researched (Jello, 2015). Ethically, it is unjust to place recruitment pressure on participants whose key priority may be maintaining their physical safety. At the same time, the absence of street sex workers from the sample means that the data do not include experiences of the most marginalised sex workers.

While most participants didn't state their age, all appeared to be between 20 and 40 years old. Nine participants worked in and around Adelaide, with eight working in and around Melbourne. A further four worked in other places, although three regularly travelled for work, and others had worked across various cities in which they had lived. The sample group was overwhelmingly Caucasian/white passing, although some participants spoke about their Greek, Italian, Chinese, Peruvian, and Thai cultural heritages. One participant identified that she had worked in New

Zealand, two said that they were born overseas, and no participants spoke about participating in sex work in a non-western country. Despite being conducted on Aboriginal land, both *Tarndanya* and *Naarm*, no participants identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.

As discussed in Chapter Three, there were ethical concerns about recruiting 17-year-old sex workers, so only workers over the age of 18 were recruited for this project. I chose to recruit both current and past sex workers because of my understanding of the transient nature of the industry, and perceptions of “sex worker” being a lifelong identity tied to stigma and belonging (to be discussed further in Chapter Five). Overall, I was surprised and humbled by the number of sex workers who chose to be involved in this project with no previous experience of being interviewed about their sex work. Many participants stated that they had never before talked about the issues discussed, which showed incredible trust in myself, and their belief in the importance of the project.

There were significant variations in relationship status within the sample, with some participants in long-term monogamous relationships, others currently single, and others practicing polyamory. Most participants, unsurprisingly, identified financial reasons for entering the sex industry, given that people generally enter work due to financial motivations. Some did, however, speak of being drawn to sex work in particular due to curiosity, a desire to perform, or to enable self-expression. No participants disclosed that they had children which limited any opportunity for discussion of motherhood as another competing identity (Ma et al., 2019).

Interviews occurred between November 2019 and May 2020. The final ten interviews were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted travel, in-person meetings, and access to university campuses. This meant that interviews were moved to an online platform (*Zoom*) which, in turn, meant that the craft activity was less interactive as I could not see participants’ progress as they made their dolls. I was largely unable to use the activity as a visual prompt for discussion and had to more deliberately work discussions of visual identity management into the online interviews. A positive outcome of the move online was that I was able to recruit outside of Adelaide and Melbourne, and this led to greater, though still limited, ethnic diversity in the sample.

The research experience

Many participants explicitly remarked on their enthusiasm to be involved in this research project: “that’s why I was super interested in doing the study cos it’s like, that’s me! And I get to have my say!” (Charlie). This echoes reflections by Weeks et al.

Our interviewees’ eagerness to talk was often due to a desire to make lesbian, gay and bisexual lives visible as a strategy in validating their own domestic and emotional life choices ... We see such responses as especially significant because they illustrate the power of the new narratives about intimate life in not only shaping individual choices but also in potentially changing the cultural circumstances in which these choices are made. (Weeks et al., 2001, p. 6)

Participants were excited by the thought of their narratives being included in academic texts because of the possibilities of connection, belonging, and validation.

Although my peer status, as with Weeks et al., created an environment of safety and shared understanding, it was more than this that inspired participation. As discussed in the introduction chapter of this thesis, being able to see ourselves reflected back from the literature is subversive and powerful, and this was not lost on participants (Eades, 2017; Killen, 2017; Lawless, 2018). Several the participants spoke of feeling as if they were the only lesbians who worked in the sex industry and were pleasantly surprised at seeing the call for participants, whereas others felt that they were surrounded by lesbians in the industry and estimated prevalence to be anywhere from 50% to 80% of girls. Some had never spoken of their experiences with anyone, others had a few close friends as confidants, and still others had colourful communities of peers, or had made a career in telling their stories.

One participant described a friend’s concern that the paper dolls activity was framing sex workers as fragile, “like china dolls”, but expressed relief when doing the activity herself, and took photos to relay the experience back to her friend who was also interested in participating. Participants remarked on the paper dolls activity as being “really comfortable” and that they were “super curious” to read the narratives of other lesbian sex workers, with Erin stating, “don’t get me wrong, just because I’m like bitter and traumatised that doesn’t mean that I don’t massively enjoy arts and crafts”.

Peer knowledge

For my participants, the use of slang – or sociolect/s – positions them as having the understanding necessary to prove insider status, as discussed in the methodology chapter. For communities that

are tightly and internally guarded, such as sex work and queer communities, knowledge of these terms is essential to be included as “one of us”. For example, many participants “tested” my insider status by using terms such as “civvie” (short for civilian to denote someone who has not worked in the sex industry), or discussed lesbian tropes such as the “urge to merge” (the phenomenon of a lesbian couple becoming very intertwined and interdependent early on in their relationship in comparison to what is expected by heteronormative standards), or physical markers of queer identity such as a carabiner (a metal looped hook used to carry keys in lieu of a handbag, identifying the user as handy and practical in their disposition). Once I had demonstrated a sound understanding of these concepts, both parties (myself and participant) had proved the cultural capital necessary to establish a trusting relationship. This process also enabled us to situate each other as successful habitus within the field of “queer sex worker”.

Theoretical findings – Whore Capital

Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice (1977) provides a sound framework to answer the research question:

How do lesbian and queer sex workers in contemporary Australia negotiate their identities and communities as both lesbians/queer, and as women who perform heterosexual sexualities?

Building on the theoretical work of Bourdieu (1979/1984), I argue that there are two distinct forms of cultural capital that comprise whore capital. The first is the capital that exists within the field of sex work, and so will be termed “Intra-industry Whore Capital”, or IIWC. Sex workers use IIWC to successfully navigate client interactions in the industry (i.e., the performance of heterosexual woman). The second form of whore capital, which I refer to as “Community Whore Capital” (CWC), is the capital that exists within some contemporary communities which can be compared to “street cred” or Morris’s (2017) “gay capital”. The data collected throughout this thesis project, as well as the burgeoning existence of sex workers in sections of popular media (for example, the autobiographies listed in Chapter Two) provide evidence that in particular social and cultural fields, the identity of “sex worker” affords an individual cultural capital. This form of whore capital also plays out *within* the sex worker communities. Whilst related to the traditional whorearchy, it is sometimes actually an inversion of that whorearchy in left wing “woke”, queer, anarchist, progressive circles where identity politics is at the core of interpersonal relations. What I mean here is that those traditionally possessing the *least* cultural capital (for example street based workers, workers of colour, survival workers) now possess the *most* cultural capital and sit atop the whorearchy because of the privileging of their positions. While these two distinct forms of

whore capital can coexist for one individual, they are not transferrable across fields, as evident in the way that stigma still plagues the lives of sex workers.

Following in the tradition of scholars who have furthered Bourdieu's theories to find extended habitus (A. Green, 2008) and alternative forms of capital (Hakim, 2011; Morris, 2017), I argue that the identified forms of capital better explain the learnings of the lesbian sex worker habitus. Lesbian or queer women who participate in sex work develop greater amounts of the first form of whore capital (that which exists in the field of commercial sex) than heterosexual sex workers because of their status as "outsiders" to the heteronorm. Put another way, they are able to perform the desired role of "woman" consciously and reflexively, as it is something separate from their lived identities and their personal relationships. The purpose of this research is not to explain the "why" of overrepresentation of lesbians in sex work, but it can explain the "how" by arguing that participants show use of these whore capitals to navigate their fields of practice. Chapters five, six, and seven will examine participant accounts alongside Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1972/1977) and existing research in relevant fields.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the findings of the study and sets the scene for the following three chapters which will discuss the implications of these findings. Beginning with capsule biographies to introduce participants as unique individuals, demographic data gleaned from interviews was then presented. I have argued that whilst the sample of twenty participants cannot be understood as representative, saturation was reached, and conceptual depth was achieved making it possible to make a valuable argument of my key findings. Pertinent to these findings is that participant narratives can be understood using Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1972/1977), extending this theory by identifying and defining two unique forms of cultural capital.

It is argued that a model of cultural capital constituting intra-industry whore capital (IIWC) and community whore capital (CWC) provides a fresh perspective. The research question of this project asks about the experiences of lesbian sex workers negotiating community and identity, and can be answered when we use a model of both intra-industry whore capital, and community whore capital. I have shown in the review of current literature that identity work is understood as important for sex workers and, equally, for queer people. The current literature, however, does not unpack what happens at the intersecting site of these two seemingly conflicting experiences of

sex/sexuality and deviance, where individuals are subject to “border wars” (Rubin, 1984; Halberstam, 1998), discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Five fills this gap in knowledge by highlighting the complexity of these experiences. The chapter commences by unpacking participants’ differing uses of language around their sexual identities. We then move on to discuss the identity practices that participants engage in, and how they relate these to the identity categories to which they belong. Participants discuss their perception of the way that sex work has impacted their identity. I argue against Hakim’s (2010, 2011) simplistic understanding of erotic capital as portable and unattached to class. Further, I argue that identity work is more consciously undertaken in the lives of lesbian sex workers, not only because of the two layers of stigma experienced, but also because of the perceived paradox of being both a lesbian (a woman who is sexually attracted to women), and a sex worker providing sexual services to men. In this way, participants exist in two conflicting fields of practice.

Chapter Five will focus on identity practices within the field of sex work and will begin to touch on identity practices within the field of queer communities (discussed further in Chapter Seven). Chapter Six provides an understanding of the impact of the embodied experience on identity. Participant narratives describe bodily management strategies which illuminate the body as both a potential site of resistance to heteronormative patriarchal norms and an opportunity to communicate belonging in a sexuality-based community. The stereotyped bodily markers of sex work and the embodied experience of non-white identities are broadly discussed to conclude this chapter’s focus on the corporeal. Chapter Seven moves away from the intra-personal experience and towards interactions with community. Chapters five, six, and seven will more thoroughly examine participant narratives using these identified capitals in a concentric way (see Figure 1). In other words, where Chapter Five is interested in individual identity work, Chapter Six broadens the focus to the embodied experience, then Chapter Seven concludes by relating the individual to the social by looking at community(ies). Using Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) Theory of Practice, it thoroughly addresses the second form of whole capital, Community Whole Capital, and demonstrates the impact of this capital on lesbian and queer sex workers’ navigation of the fields (both temporal and geographical) in which they exist.

CHAPTER FIVE: IDENTITY WORK

Introduction

Conscious identity work is engaged in at a higher level by lesbian and queer sex workers, and this allows them to develop the first form of whore capital – intra-industry whore capital (hereafter shortened to IWC). In this chapter, this is evidenced through participants’ narratives in which they display a sound understanding of their experiences within the different realms of their lives, and the way that their identity is constructed within each. I argue that identity work is so prominent in the lives of participants because of their subversion of heteronormativity, paired with the stigma and deviance of sex work as an occupation. By showing the centrality of queer identity in the everyday lives of most participants, I use the differences in their accounts to identify their experiences of whore capital. I also examine previous claims about the transferability of erotic capital (Hakim, 2010), and how this concept plays out for my participants who straddle multiple social fields. This chapter also examines how the concept of “dirty work” is experienced as “whore taint” (the unique stigma that comes from working in the sex industry) by participants, which helps to provide an understanding of the non-transferability of IWC to other social fields.

Identity is firmly interwoven with the body and community, and it is impossible to separate out distinct elements. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I have attempted to categorise the data within three themes to present them in an orderly and cohesive structure. The findings presented here demonstrate that Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) Theory of Practice provides a sound theoretical explanation of the self when it is strengthened by the concept of whore capitals.

Bourdieu’s reflexive identity work

It is understood that reflexive identity is more prominent in contemporary times: “The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (Giddens, 1990, p. 38). Some writers are critical of this idea, however, and Skeggs (2004a), in particular, argues that it does not consider class and gender barriers to what she sees as the “luxury” of identity work.

Here the self becomes a project on which to be worked. It is a dual model of the self which ... requires a self that reflects upon itself, simultaneously externalizing the self from social relations, so that the former can reflect and plan its future actions, and then reinsert itself back into society through internalization: it is a self that therefore knows its self. But it is also a self that is detached from structure. There is no sense in Giddens that the possibility of having a self may itself be a classed, raced or gendered issue...The method of constructing a biography is seen to be a neutral method, something that one just does, rather than something dependent upon access to discourse and resources. (Skeggs, 2004a, p. 53)

What Skeggs (2004a) misses in this criticism, however, is the way that reflexive identity work is actually a critical part of the lives of people who transgress social expectations in the way that lesbian and queer women sex workers do. It is exactly this transgression that necessitates reflexive, conscious identity work. In this way, reflexive identity work becomes crucial for the “underclasses” that Skeggs seeks to represent. The majority of participants in the present study become prime examples of individuals transgressing expectations of gender and sexuality and, thus, requiring reflexive, conscious identity work to navigate the fields in which they are practicing. Here, Bourdieu’s understanding of identity work as constant, field specific, and generative offers a useful perspective for understanding these participants. Using a Bourdesian approach also enables the recognition of class as “a dynamic of history, a lived experience and something which is in continual production” and bringing class to the forefront of the analysis “allows us to better understand the process of exclusion and broader inequalities” (France & Roberts, 2017, p. 3). Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) Theory of Practice allows us to understand the way that capital is linked to, but distinct from, simple economic resources. The ways that class showed up in participant narratives is more thoroughly discussed at the end of this chapter.

In response to the research question, “How do lesbian and queer sex workers in contemporary Australia negotiate their identities and communities as both lesbians/queer, and as women who perform heterosexual sexualities?” this chapter uses Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice to explain the research finding that identity work is consciously considered and continuing.

Defining queer and lesbian

I don’t really know what queer means... Can you explain what queer means to you? (Bella)

Um, I use gay, I guess les... I’m a lesbian? (GG)

To properly examine participants’ experiences, it is first necessary to understand how they defined their own sexuality. This is important, as it was these definitions that provided the parameters of the study. As discussed in Chapter Three, this project was initially titled *Lesbian Sex Workers*:

formation of identity and experience of community(s), but was changed to include the term “queer” because of the limiting nature of the term “lesbian”. While research projects must have parameters, I realised that many of the women whom I might describe as lesbians, would not define themselves with such a term, thus, broadening the scope to include the term “queer” became necessary. Reworking the research question as “How do lesbian and queer sex workers in contemporary Australia negotiate their identities and communities as both lesbians/queer, and as women who perform heterosexual sexualities?” gave more information for prospective participants to make an informed decision about whether they identified within the parameters or not. The information sheet emailed out to prospective participants contained the following:

The researcher has chosen to include the term “queer” as it is an umbrella term used by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community (LGBTI). Some women who only have sexual relationships with other women in their personal lives may not feel able to use the term ‘lesbian’ because of their sexual contact with men as part of their work, this study aims to include these women. The researcher is specifically looking for women who only have sex and relationships with other women (cis and trans) outside of their work. (See Appendix C)

During the recruitment stage, two prospective participants emailed me requesting further information and, after receiving the information sheet, replied that they did not fit the criteria. One stated that she identified as “bisexual and polyamorous” so whilst she identified as queer she did not fit within the category of a woman who has relationships with women only, and another as “queer and bisexual” with most of her relationships outside of work being with men. This highlights the difficulty in defining a population based on sexuality labels.

Within these parameters, the 20 women who participated in the study defined their sexuality in diverse and varied ways, as discussed next. Understandings of identity are, in part, shaped by the language we have available to us, and so rather than this section simply being about preferences of language and terminology, it provides a deeper understanding of the way that labels, language, and terminology are context-specific, classed, and situated in political and temporal contexts. Language, and particularly identity labels, also dictate which communities we are welcomed into and excluded from which becomes apparent in the following accounts.

Participants were asked to choose a label that best described their sexual identity. Some quickly defended their “woman who loves women” (WLW) status, while others used different terms to describe an identity that they felt could shift with them as their sexual partners changed. When explaining their chosen label, quite a few participants mentioned partners who had transitioned, or may transition, from identifying as women, to non-binary or trans. For some, the solution to the

fluidity of a partner's gender was the word queer; for others, queer did not provide that safety. Here, we can understand that gender (of both participants and their partners) and attempts to understand our own sexuality are inextricably interwoven. As explained above, queer is a term that has different meanings dependant on context and understanding. Participants' reasoning for the rejection of the term queer is illustrated below.

Despite most following up with an explanation, almost all participants were able to pick a one-word label for their sexuality. This illustrates how we are forced into understandable boxes by society, however, again, almost all participants felt the need to explain their own meaning of the label they offered, showing that one word alone cannot encompass a person's entire sexuality. Further, participants were aware that labels are context specific, and are not understood to have the same meaning by everyone. Many participants had changed the labels they use to describe their sexuality over time, often because of shifting attraction to different genders and increased exposure to non-binary genders, but also for political reasons. At least one participant currently identified as bisexual due to the flexibility of this label, which is consistent with Jen's (2019) study of bisexual identifying women which found that "ambivalence toward sexual labels, bisexuality created freedom and possibility in the full context of their lives" (Jen, 2019, p. 386).

Amy reported that, for her, "lesbian" had sex worker exclusionary connotations, describing the term as "gatekeeper". She discussed her girlfriend's firm use of the word lesbian, however, as an identity she claims as a trans woman. Amy stated that it meant something different for herself as a cisgender sex worker.

Yeh, I use gay a lot. I feel like it sums up my experience more ... I feel like lesbian has almost a gatekeeper feel of "well are you strictly a lesbian? ... do you still like men, do you? Then you're not a lesbian". And also I've found people that identify as lesbian have been sex work exclusionary in the past. Yeh I still like to identify as a dyke. I dunno, it's just a word I love ... and yeh, I do flirt around with bisexual because my girlfriend likes to tell me it's my internalised biphobia that stops me from doing so and I'm like "yeh you're probably right about that but" (laughs). Yeh, but I've definitely gone through stages where I've been like nope I'm a lesbian. ... My last five long term relationships have all been with women and I've definitely had phases there where I'm like, well I'm definitely not playing for the other team at all anymore and then I'll have a fling with some guy, and I'll be like ahh shit. So yeh. (Amy)

The identity of lesbian, and panic over the "disappearing" lesbian is a much explored topic within feminist academia (Farquhar, 2000; Stein, 2010; Forstie, 2020), often linked to transphobic discourse (S. Jeffreys, 2018). Forstie (2020) explored the use of the term "post-lesbian" in her piece *Disappearing Dykes? Post-Lesbian Discourse and Shifting Identities and Communities* and found that lesbian shares a "contested space" with queer and trans identities. She highlights that,

even though contemporary discourse is influenced by generational difference and online discourse, “lesbian” has always had a contested meaning (Forstie, 2020, p. 1762). This is evident in participant narratives in this study.

Amy’s account illustrates the high level of awareness amongst participants of the nuance and importance of language. It also becomes evident that participants are constantly (re)defining their identities. V echoed Amy’s acknowledgement of the gatekeeping of the term lesbian by clarifying that, although she has had sex with men previously, she “no longer engages in that” when defining herself as a lesbian. Participants are aware of discourse both within, and external to, the sexuality-based communities in which they exist, and the so called “border wars” that police the bounds of identification (Rubin, 1984; Halberstam, 1998). Similarly, GG expressed discomfort in using the term lesbian for more political reasons.

[Lesbian identity] is something I’ve argued with like lesbians I’ve dated about, and that’s just because I, I do a lot of activism and, particularly here in Melbourne, there’s a huge community of SWERFS and TERFS and its like that radical lesbian thing that I just can’t, I find it difficult to identify with a term that can be used against our community and communities I care about. (GG)

Here, both Amy and GG relate their distaste for the word “lesbian” based on an understanding of what the word denotes in the wider contemporary queer community, rather than understandings that align with their own sexual practice. We use labels (including sexual identity labels) to classify us as certain kinds of people within our communities, rather than simply denoting who we do or do not have sexual relations with. In this way, sexual identity labels become markers for cultural capital; they show that we understand this discourse and can situate ourselves accordingly. GG continues her description of why she prefers the term “gay” to represent her:

I feel it’s just a bit more like gender neutral and inclusive in terms of, I dunno ... I feel like lesbian can easily fall into transphobia and all of that. I previously identified as queer but then I was like, I dunno gay just feels the most comfortable for me. Yeh, I dunno, it’s the word I’ve just come into. (GG)

Strikingly, Amy and GG, who both reject the word lesbian because of its association with transphobia, resided in Melbourne (where SWERF and TERF academia is active, Solidarity, 2019), aligning with the finding that:

The term ‘lesbian’ has fallen out of popular use with younger queer women, as they have sought to separate themselves from what they consider to be a transphobic position. This position presents gender in a binary way, reflecting wider societal understandings of gender. (Buxton, 2020, p. 65)

As explored in Chapter Seven, there is geographic specificity in shared understandings of words and their meanings, including sexuality labels.

The identity work undertaken by participants in defining their sexuality can be understood using Bourdieu's (1977) lens of capital and field. Participants are hyper-aware of different, complex, and intersecting fields, and adapt the language that they use to protect their cultural capital in each. For E and Charlie, queer is an umbrella term and gives space for them to define their sexualities further than the confines of lesbian (Forstie, 2020). Charlie reported that her paid sexual encounters with men also complicated her use of the term lesbian:

There's not the two binary genders, like it's more than that and ... that's the main reason why I don't [use the term lesbian]. And then of course like if I'm sleeping with men for work, it's also a bit like complicated, do I still say... you know it's really hard and ... I think sometimes that comes down to why I don't necessarily want to talk about it to people who I'm not really close with. Because if I, you know, obviously pretty much exclusively date women or anyone who's not a man, but then I'm sleeping with men for work, like, it's confusing ... to some people. Like, it is; you can't ignore that it's confusing ... I guess if lesbian wasn't so exclusively women only, and it wasn't excluding other people, then I would probably identify as that. Even with the work that I do. So, for me, queer is just something ... that is an umbrella term that just will include everyone. (Charlie)

This excerpt from Charlie's interview shows the way that she has undertaken conscious identity work when attempting to label her sexuality. She is searching for a term based on the way it may be understood by other people, and the "catch-all" quality of queer provides her with freedom while, at the same time, separating her from heterosexual culture. Debates around shared meanings of the label "lesbian" are not new and were widely documented in the mid-90s (Butler, 1997; Farquhar, 2000) where non-heterosexual women attempted to define themselves in contrast to gay men and heterosexual women.

For Paton, the descriptor "lesbian" has sexualised connotations, so she refrained from using it when talking to men:

I didn't want to identify as a lesbian and I didn't know what to identify as, cos every time I would say the word lesbian, I wouldn't get the respect and the response that I would think I deserved and it was almost like I was saying it to turn them on. (Paton)

The sexualisation of the lesbian character has been discussed by Jackson and Gilbertson (2009) who looked at young New Zealanders' understandings of lesbian women on screen. Jackson and Gilbertson found that young people characterised media portrayals of lesbians as performative, constructed for the male gaze, and non-threatening to the subjects' "real" heterosexuality. Ussher and Mooney-Somers (2000) concur, and Payne found similar sexualised connotations of the

“lesbian” stating that, “lesbian desire is culturally constructed as highly sexual, perverse, predatory and masculine” (E. Payne, 2015, p.235). Paton’s history of engaging in relationships with men, and her typically feminine appearance, aligns her with the sexualised media lesbian whose queerness is apolitical, inoffensive, and appealing. Meanwhile, Bella shies away from claiming the term “queer” due to her relationships with men and AMAB people. Initially labelling herself for the purpose of the interview as “heteroflexible”, she explained that she generally dates men but is also “into girls”. Later, Bella adds: “but I don’t really understand queer. I probably am queer, but I don’t really... Yeh. I’ve always just said homoflexible. So I’m not sure”.

Bella’s casual flipping of the term “heteroflexible” to “homoflexible” shows that as the context of the conversation shifts, so does her self-labelling, although she stays within the safety of the binary between homo and hetero. When later questioned about whether she feels she presents as queer to the queer community, Bella suggested that she would not dress in a stereotypically queer way. In these excerpts, and later when she discusses her lack of success in dating women, Bella shows her lack of cultural capital within the field of contemporary queer communities. Bella has not successfully learnt ways to navigate the doxa of this field and, thus, feels unsure claiming the term “queer” as a descriptor for her identity. “Queer” is a tightly policed community (Oakley, 2016; McCann & Killen, 2019) and perceived or experienced rejection that some participants felt from the queer community will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Elyse, a Melbourne-based participant, displayed a sound understanding of the historical and contemporary position of queer women in sex work. She also lived in the queer city of Melbourne after growing up regional Australia, and identified herself as “high-femme” rather than the more common labels of gay, queer or lesbian:

In a very tongue-in-cheek way, because I think, you know, obviously it’s something that’s like, there’s only so seriously you can take yourself... with all this stuff. I remember I had a friend once call me “Nose-Bleed Femme” which I thought was really funny

(Kate: Is that kind of because “high femme”, when I think of high femme, I think of high maintenance?)

Yeh... that’s certainly – like my, I guess, barometer has always been, and this is, again, comes from like, the small shitty town I’m from ... “You could pass for straight” ... That’s the barometer of like, high-femme and that would be the compliment I’d get from people who would hit on me at the bar. It was like, “you could pass for straight”, which I was like, (sarcasm) “that’s disgusting...Tell me again” ... It was women...Like, yeh, that’s a thing ... It would be a thing of status to date someone who could pass as a straight girl, which is, you know like, that’s just... (sarcasm) “you’ve really objectified me I’m quite offended”. (Elyse)

Elyse goes on to illustrate her comprehensive understanding of the gendered expectations of women across service industries and social spheres, and how a femme identity interacts with these expectations:

I guess as well that's another thing that other femmes who weren't identifying with queer was like, if you had to pass for straight for your job, and whether that was, you know, like, low level retail or food service industry or sex work....Or low level administration, if you, you know, you have to pass, you know, it's not just performing femininity but it's performing a very narrow definition of femininity ... That's what high femme was, and also I knew that would be a matter of protection for the people I was dating The more, like, mainstream attractive I was, or the more ... straight I looked, that was like, a status thing to them and also a matter of protection ... Straight men respect thatWhether they talk about it or not, there's a difference between like, "wow you're gross dykes,"... Or like, "she just likes what I like"...It's easier to see "who's the man" ... that's something they understand, and they're like, "oh yeh not bad". (Elyse)

This segment is an illustration of Elyse's understanding of her positionality as a non-heterosexual woman in a heteronormative world, and her critical reflection on her identity. Her position as a femme woman is in the context of her relationships with people who do not fit into these binary and rigid structures. I will later argue that it is this positionality as a non-heterosexual woman that gives Elyse and other participants the lens to see the higher level of performativity necessitated by the sex industry. Elyse further articulates the way that her sexual and gender identity is connected to, and defined in conjunction with, the people that she has relationships with.

(Kate: like say if you're looking at that, the *Her* app,⁷ you know how you kind of present your queerness to the world, or is that important to you, or...?)

A little bit, I always assu... I know the sort of, I'll say "woman" for the purposes of this conversation. [The person] I'm interested in is probably also exclusively interested in a woman like me ... So that's kind of lucky, and like my thing on the apps has always been like, my only description is "me:", and then a line of like, high-heel emoji, diamond emoji, pink-bow emoji, martini-glass emoji, like something else, and then "you:" weights-emoji, whiskey-emoji (laughs) Like, (laughs) just these really cliché [symbols], and then like, that's it. Yeh (laughs) That's all I put, and I'm like, if you get it...

(Kate: and a rainbow flag or no?)

No!

(Kate: Wow.)

If you get it you get it, or you don't, and if you don't get that ... I'm like, honestly, everything else I do is like, yeh It's gonna be too much, I'm too old, I can't explain that shit to you ... If I have to

⁷ A dating app specifically for lesbians.

meet someone like ... a butch or a masc queer in their thirties that needs the concept of ...femme and like femme-bottom even ... explained to them, ... I just, I don't have time. (Elyse)

Elyse shows here that her sexuality is connected to both her gender identity and her sexual role, and tied to the history of Butch-Femme relationships. She seeks partners who speak the same language as she does, and who have the cultural capital necessary within the queer field to interpret her positionality as a femme woman in relation to their masculinity. Elyse displays confidence that her physical appearance on a dating app, paired with some carefully chosen emojis, can communicate that she is a femme seeking butches, rather than a straight woman. For Elyse, resistance to use of the word queer is bound up in her understanding of her sexual identity, but also her sex worker identity and, further, to her temporal experience of homosexuality and her location as someone who grew up regionally rather than in an urbanised environment.

Because I've always so strongly identified with very much butch-femme and the role that femme sex workers played In the lives of the mass people around them, "queer" always felt just not accessible, it just, it didn't. It felt, you know, "you're too poor".... which I think a lot of other queer sex workers I know who are maybe, definitely thirty-five and over, definite-maybe thirty and older, agree, and then very much everyone under twenty-eight, ... is like a complete other century ... and [they] act like, very cool ... I come from somewhere much more rural ...than a lot of people, and I didn't move to a big city and I didn't move as soon as I was eighteen. (Elyse)

This, again, highlights the impact of positionality in the use of descriptor words. The meanings attached to words such as "gay", "lesbian", and "queer" are not transferrable across fields; rather, they are entirely context specific. Ava, who presented as a similar age to Elyse but had spent the majority of her life in Perth rather than Melbourne, also shied away from using the term lesbian to identify herself: "I hope it's not offensive but, like, candidly I just hate the word lesbian ...I just think it sounds like a disease".

This tongue in cheek excerpt from Jacqueline Frances's autobiography echoes Ava's sentiment describing being lesbian as being pronounced a leper:

I hate the word "lesbian". In the English language, it's used as a noun, while "gay" is a mere adjective. "Gay" is an afterthought when describing a person: old, green, rich, blonde, bland... GAY! *Les...bi...an..* is a fucking designation, like a leper or a criminal or a pot roast. A type of person rather than a quality attributed to them. With each syllable, I feel like I'm being confined into a tiny triangle to be distinguished as something "other", to be observed from behind glass. In my research, the general consensus is that all women of the Sapphic persuasion hate the term "lesbian", and that most of us prefer just about ANY other designation. I've compiled a list of nouns that can stand in the place of "lesbian" to which you are encouraged to refer if the word "gay" is just not weighty enough for you: rug-muncher, bean-flicker, dyke, queer, gayelle, ladyfag, lady-lover, thoughtful-good-listener-but-crazy-ass-bitch, scissor-sister, U-hauler, muff-diver, woman, sentient being. (J. Frances, 2015, p. 16)

While acknowledging that the term “queer” had negative connotations for some older people, Ava felt that, for her, the reclamation of it was important, and gave her a label to belong to without feeling the need to be specific about the people she dated.

I don't think it's anyone's business if I only date women or if I don't ... I think I've seen a lot of friends who have, you know, come out as one or the other and then their relationships over the years have been with women, men, trans people, non-binary people, and it's like you're having to re-come out or claw to try and have your relationship validated or seen as significant when people have boxed you in as something else. (Ava)

Ava's use of the term “claw” in this context speaks to the boundary-policing present in queer and lesbian communities that will be discussed further in Chapter Seven. While Elyse feels that “queer” is unattainable due to her class status and regional background, Ava's position might be understood in relation to Brontsema's (2004) assertion that, “queer boldly questions the very construct of sexual abnormality (and thus normality)” (p. 10). Similarly, when I asked Harmony what “queer” meant for her, she replied that:

It means for me that I still do feel sexual attraction to men ... but only if I'm emotionally connected with them ... which takes a long time for me ... So I never have that attraction in sex work because it's ... I mean tops two hours you spend with them, and it takes me months to develop emotional connection to a man ... and it's only happened a few times that I've actually been sexually attracted to a man ... There are just a few unicorns out there. (Harmony)

We can see that “queer” provides for Harmony and Ava the exact flexibility that it denies for Elyse. Harmony continues to illustrate her temporal relationship to “queer”.

I was a very gay bisexual for a while! And then I discovered queer, the word, and it just fit me perfectly ... Cos I struggled with that for a little while too, not being able to fit into any boxes ... I didn't know which box to put myself in ... so I was really happy to find that.'

Harmony expressed happiness at finding a label that fit her, which points to the importance of identity categories in the way that we experience ourselves.

Historically, “queer” was reclaimed by those with non-normative sexualities in a very political way. Examples of early positive use (as opposed to use as a pejorative aimed at the non-sexually normative community) include this description in a *Queer Nation* manifesto:

It means everyday fighting oppression; homophobia, racism, misogyny, the bigotry of religious hypocrites and our own self-hatred. ... And now of course it means fighting a virus as well, and all those homo-haters who are using AIDS to wipe us off the face of the earth. Being queer means leading a different sort of life. It's not about the mainstream, profit-margins, patriotism, patriarchy or being assimilated. ... It's about being on the margins, defining ourselves; ... Everyone of us is a world of infinite possibility. ... Yeah, QUEER can be a rough word but it is also a sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe's hands and use against him. (Queer Nation, 1990)

V used the term “lesbian” but stated that, during her life, she had bounced from one label to another (straight, bisexual, asexual) without ever falling on “queer”. She felt that sexuality was fluid and could shift over time.

It’s definitely opened me up to a lot of things and trying to, like, enjoy a lot of things and just not stressing so much about everything as well. Like, at the end of the day, labels are just labels. ... It’s not like I’m ever gonna be that person that’s like, “no I’m, I’m a lesbian!” you know, and be really intense about anything. ... Everything’s a spectrum ... I might meet a dude who I’m just like, yeh, I think you’re the love of my life. (V)

Elyse, who stated that “queer is probably the most accurate” descriptor, but felt that it was an inaccessible term for her due to her lower class status, rural background, and the size of her body.

I would prefer the term “lesbian”, but everyone I’ve dated, bar one, has transitioned, either before, during, or after the course of our relationship ... So it just feels like that journey’s not for me... Queer is probably the most accurate, but as someone... I haven’t been through university, I come from a relatively working-class background. (Elyse)

What we see in Elyse’s hesitancy to declare herself queer is the way that these terms are not only descriptive of sexual practice, but inextricably linked to social class, amongst other identity categories. Weber (1996) found that “working-class lesbian women are more likely to define themselves as butch or femme” (p. 279) when compared with middle- and upper-class women who preferred to avoid these terms. Globally, debates about the “queerification” of lesbian spaces and identities continue to rage (Macias, 2022), whilst, locally, pro-lesbian and anti-queer arguments can most often be linked to trans-exclusionary radical feminist authors (Megarry et al., 2022) who fail to even mention issues of class in the inaccessibility of particular identity labels but, instead, focus on a perceived threat of invisibility of women who love women within broader non-heterosexual communities. While many authors have written of their concerns about the “death” of lesbianism, or post-lesbian or post-gay societies, Stein’s observation, more than a decade ago, is relevant here:

We are not seeing the end of women who fall in love and make their lives with other women. We are probably not even seeing a demographic decline. What we are seeing, quite possibly, is the exhaustion of particular historical construction: a group of individuals who are defined primarily on the basis of their sexual identity. (Stein, 2010, p. 24)

Reflecting Stein’s (20120) point, the participants’ narratives offered here show that sexual identity labels relate to much more than sexual activity; they are used by participants to define one’s culture, class background, political ideals, *and* sexual orientation/s, preferences, and activity. While some authors describe a “post-gay world” where sexual identity categories are irrelevant

(Ghaziani, 2014), I argue that this is not the experience of my participants who, for the most part, showed reflexive, purposeful engagement in defining their sexual identities, and whose lives are very much affected by their non-normative position within heteronormative society. Sexual identity terms, such as lesbian, queer, femme, and gay, hold shared and debated meanings. Lastly, an important note needs to be made about the gap between the way that the term “queer” has been adopted by the queer community (or non-heteronormative community), and the way that it is used in an academic space (i.e., queer theory).

Despite its laudable ambition and broad academic appeal, queer theory tends to lapse into a discursively burdened, textual idealism that glosses over the institutional character of sexual identity and the shared social roles that sexual actors occupy. This elision plagues the queer project by creating a theoretical cataract that permits only a dim view of the contribution of the “social” to the sexual. As a consequence, queer theory constructs an undersocialized “queer” subject with little connection to the empirical world and the sociohistorical forces that shape sexual practice and identity. (A. Green, 2002, p. 522)

This disconnect between “queer” in the academy, and “queer” as it plays out in real life, adds further context to Elyse’s hesitancy to use the word in her self-identification. Contemporary queer and non-heterosexual communities are complex, contested, and shifting, and I return to an in-depth analysis of the impact of this on community connection in Chapter Seven.

Overt Identity work and the gendered heterosexual performance

Participants showed high levels of both conscious identity work, and understanding of the way that identity work is a feature of their lives as women who occupy deviant sexualities. Drawing on data from this study, I argue that lesbian sex workers engage in conscious, reflexive identity work to a greater extent than the general population, necessitated by both queer/lesbophobia and whorephobia. Stigma management strategies are well understood in contemporary literature (see Chapter Three), as is the way that legislation perpetuates stigma (Stardust et al., 2021). Whilst studies focusing on stigma management make an important contribution to better understand the impact of sex work on the daily lives of women, they rely on an assumption that suggests stigma is an inherent element of sex work, and most fail to acknowledge or interrogate the intersection of queer or non-normative sexuality and the stigma generated by this work. Using an intersectional lens, we can assume that heteronormativity and the impact of sexual identity on workplace practices (Dunk-West, 2012) will show up in slightly different strategies being effective for the focus population. Whilst we will briefly ask whether these or other stigma management strategies are employed by participants, to identify differences and similarities between queer and straight

sex working women, this is not the focus of the work – this thesis is a deep exploration of identity practices of queer and lesbian sex working women.

The political nature of both sex worker and queer identities influences the ways in which participants claim or refuse common labels that may be applied to them by an outsider based on their sexual activity. In this way, lesbian sex workers consciously engage in identity work, and successfully use their social capitals within multiple fields. Harmony, for example remarked, in a discussion about identity that: “I try and not get too caught up on it, but I mean if you’re queer, it’s hard to avoid... It’s super important ... I don’t want to get drowned out you know?”

Participants actively talked about engaging in a performance of heterosexuality. As well as altering their bodily appearance, discussed further in Chapter Six, participants engaged in performative behaviours in their interactions with clients but, more surprisingly, also while interacting with fellow sex workers, and even outside of sex work. When interacting with clients, their performance of “heterosexual woman” included elements such as giggling, speaking in a high-pitched voice, and acting “ditzzy” to perform as submissive and feminine. Full-service sex worker Harmony, who rarely had sexual interactions with men outside of work, labelled her work self as a “real heterosexual performance”.

She’s, yeh, kind of what you see in TV movies. I kind of keep it really straight which is just quite submissive in the sense that, like, I’ll honour everything they want to an extent, really sweet, like very “wife material” you know ... Super giggly! Its super high pitched, ... the raspiness goes away and ... she’s super giggly and just cheeky and like ... what they want, what they see as, like, a sexual creature, but also what they want to be in their kitchen in the morning! (Harmony)

For Harmony, this performance of a heterosexual woman was additional to the performance of sexuality she witnessed of heterosexual sex workers. Her use of third person to describe the performance of her work character was not uncommon amongst participants, and alludes to the construction of an “other”. Whilst no participants explicitly identified that the tone or pitch of voice they generally used were linked to their sexuality as a queer woman, the “lesbian voice” has previously been discussed by Crowder in her analysis of the construction of the lesbian body.

I would include in this reclaiming of space and volume another phenomenon seldom noticed or remarked upon even within the lesbian community. Lesbians frequently use the voice in a distinctive way, lowering the pitch or modulating the use of the higher registers of the voice. This is not a lowering of pitch to make oneself more masculine but rather a relaxing of the vocal apparatus to allow the voice to drop to its normal register. This phenomenon reveals just how artificial are the high pitch and weak tones of the “feminine” voice adopted unconsciously by many heterosexual women. Lowered pitch usually accompanies stronger volume and tone as well. (Crowder, 1998, p. 59)

I argue that this unconscious adoption of higher pitch by heterosexual women referred to by Crowder becomes a deliberate, learned, and conscious strategy of heterosexual performance for lesbian sex workers. This illustrates one factor of the conscious ways that participants approach identity construction within the sex industry – what I identify as intra-industry whore capital.

Harmony's reference of a performance of being "wife material" recognises the full gender role that she felt was expected of her within an interaction with clients. This role is, of course, a classed version of "heterosexual woman". As Lawler (2004) states, "gender is central here, as one axis around which class distinctions are drawn and maintained (and, of course, vice-versa). That is, part of the different meanings attached to different forms of masculinity and femininity cohere around class" (p.110).

Harmony's performance is one of a submissive, feminine woman – almost the opposite of stereotypes about sex workers who are generally portrayed as brash, dirty, and uncivilised in popular depictions. Here we can understand the classed performance of women to be differently constituted depending on the class expectations of the client.

There is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term women denotes a common identity. Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, women, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety ... Gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (Butler, 1990, p. 31).

In longer term relationships with regular clients Harmony was expected to become "more of a nurturer". Olasik (2016) described womanhood or woman-ness to then position lesbian as a type of woman. She understands gender through Butler's (1990) notion of performativity, stating that "What 'society' perceives as being a woman/man is really a doing of a woman/man" (Olasik, 2016, p. 205). I argue that lesbian sex workers are more highly aware of the performative nature of woman due to their deviance from the role in their personal lives, and the active performance in their working lives. This performance of "ideal woman" becomes more complex when a sex worker is a straight trans woman, as expressed by Erin when asked if she saw a division between herself and her heterosexual sex worker colleagues.

Yeh, I think so. ... A lot of them are more concerned with ... really conventional goals. Like, my main goal with sex work is just to, you know, get to the end of the week and then hopefully ... you know move on at some point. But most of them are, like, saving up for their middle-class suburban dreams and they really want to meet a man, and some of them even countenance the concept of meeting and marrying a client. I've known a couple who have [done that], and that

just weirds me the fuck out. ... More power to them, they have nice stable lives now. But I just yeh, I just can't even understand. It just absolutely boggles my mind. (Erin)

Harmony is also careful to simulate acceptable gender stereotypes of male domination and female submission in her performance, perhaps overcompensating to account for the loss of masculinity felt by a male sex buyer. Modern gender roles require men to be sexually able, virile, and commanding, and men who are participating in a commercial sex transaction risk their masculinity being challenged by this. As Pendleton states, "the act of making men pay is, in fact, quite subversive. It reverses the terms under which men feel entitled to unlimited access to women's bodies" (Pendleton, 1997, p. 79). The amount that commercial sex subverts class relations, however, has been debated by Berg (2015) who used a Marxist framework.

Harmony's consideration and clear articulation of the performance she engages in is evidence that this is a consciously constructed act. Harmony has learnt what it means in contemporary Australia to be a good heterosexual woman, and she creates a performance of this inside her bookings. Here we see that sex work is not simply about a physical sexual experience but is, instead, a space where men live out their desires of gendered relations. Previously, Stoebenau (2009) sought to understand the client-worker interaction by positioning sex work as a field, using Bourdieu's model. I expand on Harmony's conscious performance by returning to the concept of whore capital.

Harmony had worked in the sex industry for three years at the time of the interview, beginning in brothels and now as a private worker. Sex work had increased Harmony's confidence both within her interactions with male clients, and in dating women outside of work. The impact of sex work on interpersonal relationships is explored further in Chapter Seven, however, a key feature in Harmony's account of sex work was her articulation of the impact of sex work on her ability to negotiate different fields. Harmony remarked that doing sex work had changed who she was and the way she behaved. Firstly, Harmony had a conscious understanding of the development of what she saw as her confidence through her sex work. This confidence went hand-in-hand with the assertive dominance necessitated by the practicalities of being a sexual service provider, as discussed above – Harmony needed to orchestrate the booking, the interaction between herself and clients as the provider of that service. Secondly, she was able to articulate tactics used to "play the game" or, as Bourdieu (1977) would call it, to navigate the field. Through trial and error, "just very rehearsed over a long time", she identified the skills learnt in playing the game and was able to identify different versions of herself that were presented to different clients. In Bourdieu's

terms, this might be understood as practical mastery of her role in sex work; thus, the possession of whore capital. I argue that, in this context, whore capital is a distinct form of cultural capital developed by an individuals' navigation of the field of client-worker interactions. Practical mastery is described by Bourdieu as *le Sens pratique* or practical sense. The habitus develops a "feel for the game" from previous experience and interactions, evident here in the participants' integration of this knowledge into itself to use in future interactions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In this study, queer and lesbian sex workers showed a highly refined mastery of the game of sex work, possibly due to the added separation from their life outside of work. I argue that it is this separation, or standing outside looking in, which enables them to develop these skills, this whore capital.

Harmony learnt which mannerisms worked to increase her financial gain in the industry, demonstrating a high level of whore capital. In contrast, when talking about the exclusion she felt from the queer community due to being a "plus-sized" woman, Harmony showed that she lacked "gay capital" (Morris, 2017), which illustrates the way that different forms of capital are not transferrable across fields. Harmony remarked that:

The only lesbians we see on television and [are considered] acceptable [are] straight looking femme white women. ... We don't have much representation, and it's not really anyone's fault that that's what they go for... cos that's kind of what we're told we go for anyway. At least with heterosexual representation they actually show all different kinds of couples ... but with lesbians its either two butch old women or ... two really gorgeous porn-star looking [women]. (Harmony)

The experience of fatphobia permeated much of Harmony's interview, illustrating the way that the body impacts significantly on identity and the limitations on the habitus' ability to adapt across fields. I discuss the corporeal experience further in the next chapter.

Harmony's observation of media discourse aligns with what McDermott (2011) refers to as the "world some have won" (p. 63).. Her argument is that non-normative sexuality is available, and presented as such through media, to some people – white, middle class, and, indeed, as Harmony points out, thin – while still being out of reach of others. Similarly, Charlie, 23, who began sex work at 18, has worked in various areas of the industry over the last five years. Her first experiences in the industry were in a host type role at sex parties, a role offered to her by a man that she was seeing in a romantic context. She had also worked as a private escort attending events and trips away with "corporate clients who just want someone to look nice and pretty and be on their arm; you know, that sort of stuff" (Charlie).

Charlie showed that she understands the product she was selling with her work. Similar to Harmony's observation about being a wife figure within brothel bookings, Charlie played a role that necessitated the invention of a particular identity, which she later identified as being similar to other customer service roles (as in Hochschild, 1983). Within her marketing of her online content, Charlie remarked that she was aware of appealing to the cis-male eye. Instead of using terms that she would use to describe herself in her personal life, such as "queer", she labelled herself as a lesbian. Here, Charlie uses the sexualisation of the term "lesbian" as a marketable advantage, where Paton refrained from using the term in her personal life because of the very same connotations. Charlie made comparisons with other customer service roles in talking about the way she changed the pitch of her voice, in that "you talk to a receptionist on the phone and they've got a really high chirpy voice and ... that's what they're presenting and that's what I feel like it is" (Charlie).

The way that women accommodate men within transactions has previously been understood by Hochschild (1983) as emotional labour in her significant study of aeroplane hostesses. Hochschild highlights the potential risk of a female worker failing at her role of "managing feelings". In the example of plane travel, hostesses need to keep their passengers feeling safe, calm, and secure to maintain order amongst a group of strangers doing what is, in essence, quite dangerous; travelling by air. Similarly, for sex workers, managing feelings can be the difference between a client leaving happy and content, and the worker facing violence. This high-stakes situation requires a deft performance that matches what the client is expecting. The way that a worker achieves this performance depends on her use of accumulated whore capital.

It is evident that these agents have a conscious understanding of what is expected of them as heterosexual-acting women, and they use this in the field of client-worker interactions to achieve social capital that can be exchanged for economic capital. An interesting difference between Harmony, a brothel worker, and Charlie, a private escort, is the absence of a submissive woman in Charlie's performance. I argue that this difference does indeed relate to the amount that a client's masculinity is at risk in the encounter. A client's experience of entering a brothel space is a very different power dynamic than hiring an escort for a high-class event or holiday. Generally, in a brothel setting, a client is invited to a waiting room by a madam or receptionist (commonly referred to as a "recep") where he then waits for available workers to perform an intro. The brothel becomes the site of service provision and, again, the male client is usually outnumbered by women, as he is a visitor to their workplace. In contrast, a private escort generally enters the

world of the client when accompanying him to an event or on a date. Participants spoke about the process of learning what is expected and learning to mask other elements of themselves. We can understand this through Bourdieu's (1972/1977) lens of the habitus adjusting to a new field and acquiring capital – in this case, intra-industry where capital.

An alternative theory to understand this behaviour is that of code-switching. Initial use of the term code-switching built on Du Bois (1990) theory of double consciousness in his seminal work first published in 1903, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Kirkland, 2013). Code-switching was used to describe the use of two languages by bilingual people to communicate effectively, but separately, with both their own cultural group, and (what was generally) the coloniser. Code-switching is a term originally used in the field of linguistics to describe the act of altering one's vernacular depending on the audience. A high-profile example of code-switching in recent years was the former president Obama's much criticised ability to relate to both the Black working class community, and also communicate effectively with white upper-class crowds through shifting of tone, vernacular, and use of slang (J. M. Morton, 2014) from what is sometimes referred to as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Ebonics (Myers, 2020). Current use of the phrase "code-shifting" has evolved to not only relate to different dialects such as Spanglish or Singlish used by migrant or colonised peoples, but also includes cultural practices and dispositions outside of spoken words, particularly in the African American community where it is used to assimilate (Myers, 2020).

Code switching as a term has progressed to encompass more than simply spoken language; it also includes mannerisms, dress, and other factors relating to the display of one's identity for the purpose of communication with multiple and separate groups. This is seen in the way that participants spoke about deliberate modes of dressing to communicate a heterosexual performance. The display is purposeful and performative (Myers, 2020), however, it is not inauthentic or wholly a performance, nor is it always conscious (McRae, 2013). We can hear this in the way that Frankie grapples to describe her sex worker persona, stating that, "she's definitely not me, she's something... something else entirely ... but I guess, obviously, she's a part of me a part of my life because that's a character that I play" (Frankie). Code switching has been linked to Black respectability politics (Myers, 2020) and, similarly, gay respectability (discussed in Chapter Two and again in Chapter Seven) also necessitates code-switching for queer people.

When comparing the usefulness of both the theory of code-switching and Bourdieu's (1972/1977) theory of habitus, field, and capital, I argue that whilst code-switching is somewhat useful,

Bourdieu's theory is more salient. For Bourdieu, the habitus is a learnt disposition variant according to the field and dependent on capital. Using code-switching, an individual adapts and modifies their presences depending on the audience, and the space. Scholars have compared the two theories using racial code-switching (language, but also disposition more broadly) and the way it is used in education and career (Coppola, 2015). Recently, queer communities have co-opted the term code-switching to understand the way that they move through heteronormative as opposed to queer spaces. The use of the *term* "code switching" does not yet appear in the literature explaining behaviour of sexual minority communities, however, studies have concluded that "voice is a flexible communication device that allows speakers to consciously or unconsciously manage their sexual identity in social interactions" (Maddalena et al., 2020, p. 2597).. This draws on ideas of the "gay voice" (Maddalena et al., 2020), being closeted, and masking behaviours (a form of code-switching) to describe the experience of people whose gender and sexuality presentation are not necessarily tolerated across spaces (Kunstman, 2017). Code-switching as an academic theory, however, does not address why some actors have success whereas others are met with failure when attempting to communicate effectively across fields. Bourdieu's (1972/1977) Theory of Practice addresses this more clearly with his explanation of field specific doxa and the capital that is necessarily acquired by the habitus that lives across fields, thus, the Theory of Practice becomes a more salient model for understanding these participants.

When speaking about her journey into sex work, Charlie explained that it took her a while to find a successful work persona, and even to realise that she needed to create a character for this purpose. She felt that this persona served a dual purpose: it acted as a barrier between her real identity and the client relationship, and it provided the femininity expected by the client. Charlie described this tactic as a "top layer" which she consciously kept "nice and smooth" to enable an enjoyable experience for her client. She referenced a "learning experience" and "reading off other people" when describing how this successful persona had developed. Understood through Bourdieu's lens, it becomes clear that as Charlie accumulated the necessary capital, she was able to more successfully play the field.

Initially Paton had thought her non-normative sexuality would serve as a selling point for clients:

It was quite easy to fall into that, you know, being hetero and selling myself as a heterosexual woman. ... At first, I actually did tell people, like, I was gay. I would tell customers I was a lesbian thinking it would get a good reaction and it most definitely did not. (Paton)

As “lesbian” had previously existed in Paton’s life as a sexualised position, it became natural for her to display this to her clients. She gained capital over time, though, which allowed her to navigate the field of the sex industry more successfully. Some participants reflected on previous romantic relationships with men to develop a successful performance. Chloe felt that she relied on her past experience of dating men in a non-commercial context to understand what a client desired from her in her erotic massage role.

Mmmm yep. Definitely I’m not as soft as I would be with women. I’m more overtly sexual. Flirtatious, but with a sort of an underlying sexual tone. I feel like males or men are very driven by their penis and, like, I feel like I’ve really had to, I mean, partly that is the job anyway, what you’re there for, but I feel like I’ve had to really amp up that flirty kind of sexualised version of me, I suppose. Whereas, with girls, I don’t feel that pressure ... and I think when I was with men years ago, there was a part of me that was always, or always felt that I was acting to some degree, and I wasn’t my genuine self because I felt like I had to be this ... sexualised kind of object to, to attract male attention. Whereas with women, I could be respected or desired more for emotional intelligence or intellect or not just physical attributes I suppose ... That’s a big generalisation, I admit, but yeh. ... a lot of flirting, a lot of pandering, I suppose, as well to guys that, you know, ... they have the power or something, even though I know realistically I do have power in that room ... But in order to get the job done and to then profit from it in the future, to get them to come back and see you, and to get those regulars, which is what I quickly learnt [is] what you need, I feel like, yeh, there’s definitely a big shift ... in how I’d be towards men versus women. (Chloe)

Again, Chloe hints at the risked masculinity of the male erotic massage client, and the way she “panders” to mask the shift in power dynamics. Because she had previously navigated the heterosexual dating world in her private life, she draws on the cultural capital – the rules of the game that she already knows – to negotiate this new field successfully. This is a conscious and calculated position.

Similar to Harmony, Charlie, and Chloe, Elyse agreed that she played a heterosexual character within bookings. Elyse, however, felt that she had also slipped into playing a similar role within her queer, non-commercial relationships, mostly with transgender men. Expressing with her incredibly dry humour that she had fallen into the trap of becoming a partner’s “sex mum”, acting as both nurturer and wife, Elyse also used the term “Wendy” to describe this role; a reference to the character in *Peter Pan*. We can see here that queer relationships are not immune to reproducing heterosexual norms, such as Pilcher’s (2012) findings in her study of lesbian strip performances. Instead of the subversion of norms (different game rules) that Elyse craved, she used her repertoire of whore capital to negotiate the heterosexual gender role across her private and commercial sex life. Reflecting on this, and her hopes for future relationships, Elyse stated, “I think all women have to diminish themselves in that way under capitalism in one way or another ... So, I

would prefer to maybe be treated as an equal ... at home (laughs). What a concept... What a revolutionary idea". Again, this insight into the rules of her games shows high levels of cultural capital.

Bella, appearing to be an outlier in this study, in that she was the only participant who actively and currently had sexual experiences with men outside of her working life, and who identified as "heteroflexible", did not speak of a heterosexual or even a gendered performance. Bella referred only to the acting required to be seen as enjoying a physical sexual experience that was not in fact enjoyable:

I just turn my brain off. Like a lot of sex, you have to remind yourself to make some sort of sound ... because you're like "ohhhh yes, I'm enjoying this", but you're not (laughs). Yeh, and I love acting, I've always loved acting, so I think that helps. (Bella)

A number of participants said that, whilst they initially curated a performance as the heterosexual woman, after gaining a "regular" (a client who books services on an ongoing basis), they could "drop the façade" a little. Erin's account is extraordinarily interesting as the only participant who identified as a transgender woman, and who had previously worked in sex work, presenting as a gay man. Her insight into the importance of a heterosexual performance as a trans woman, therefore, is arguably richer:

[With] trans work, like, you get fantasists and fetishists, like, as really par for the course. ... I get a lot of guys in who ... don't just want the, like, expected lowkey performance of heterosexuality that ... you associate with sex work, but want like a sort of fantasist performance of ... "will you marry me? I'm going to treat you so good baby ... " Like, that happens to me like every third client or so ... I've had guys twice in one week come in and insist that they're going to whisk me away and ... let me ride in their boat and marry me ... as soon as their "bitch wife" is out of their life, which I think maybe that also comes down to the idea that ... heterosexual men of a certain age consider trans women less trouble because they're less desirable to other men. ... I dunno if that's just something that I've observed or I've also read or seen parroted in culture, but I really feel like that's a, that's a strong vibe. So I get a lot of that and having to perform that is ah... like, sometimes I find it really stressful, sometimes I find it kind of fun because it's just like, oh my god, ... this is the most ridiculous thing It's almost so surreal that it becomes funny ... and sometimes I indulge the fantasy cos I'm just like "this is ridiculous you are such a weirdo!" But, other than that, just the basic performance of heterosexuality of, like, "I'm enjoying this", which I'm finding increasingly hard to do. (Erin)

Erin has a clear understanding of the way that gender is performative, perhaps due to her experience of socially (and physically) transitioning from one gender to another. Despite her nuanced and self-aware position, she must perform within the same structures of binary gender expected of all women in the sex industry.

Ava, who was previously a private and brothel worker, began working in the sex industry through her girlfriend's sex work. She also agreed that the heterosexual performance was essential for securing clients and, like Charlie, felt it provided a further benefit of a separation between her home and work identities. When Ava spoke about providing a commercial sex service to women, she identified a real difference in her experience, although this has shifted over time.

I feel like I am quite well-versed in the script of having sex with men and knowing how to perform, or knowing what they want, or, you know, the porn experience, the girlfriend experience. Women, I feel like they're just a little bit more switched on ... naturally wanting a more sensual or emotional experience and, for me, it didn't feel comfortable because I know I'm faking it, and I think you're better than that. ... Now that I'm a bit older, I think I'd be like "no, if you're paying for sex, if you're paying for this experience, totally it's a transaction". Back then, I think I was, yeh, still very much, like, clinging to my identity and not wanting to be seen as boxed in as only a sex worker. (Ava)

Here, Ava battled with an ethical dilemma of feeling she owed more authenticity to her female clients. Although she did not find an ethical issue with using her whore capital for financial gain with men, she felt that women were "better than that". Again, Lola also felt "well-versed" in what was expected of a heterosexual woman because of her relationship with a man when she entered the stripping industry.

It's been harder since I broke up with my boyfriend, I think because, it sounds bad, I like love him to death, but I was kind of used to putting on that performance in my day-to-day life, so it was easy to kind of just take it that step further at work... Whereas now, or since like I broke up with my boyfriend and kind of like came out a little bit, ... I'm not fully out but, like, my close circle knows. ... I go to work and ... I have to work harder almost, to put it on, because in my day-to-day life now, ... I feel like I act very gay (laughs), and then I go to work and I have to, like, you know, just femme it up a bit. (Lola)

Here, Lola shows how her whore capital *was* actually useful outside of her sex worker role, and within her heterosexual relationship. This is what Hakim (2010) terms "erotic capital".

Erotic capital is thus a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society, and especially to members of the opposite sex, in all social contexts. In some cultures, fertility is a central element of women's greater erotic capital...Erotic capital includes skills that can be learnt and developed, as well as advantages fixed at birth. Women generally have more of it than men, even in cultures where fertility is not an integral element, and they deploy it more actively. (Hakim, 2010, p. 501).

My theory of IIWC shares components with Hakim's (2010) erotic capital, however, I argue that IIWC is a specific form of capital accumulated by workers in the sex industry, and exchanged for economic capital, and one that lesbian and queer women have an advantage at gaining due to their externality to heteronormative society. Here, we can see that Lola is consciously aware of the field she finds herself in, and the strategies she must use to navigate that field:

I think a very big part of any sex work is being able to identify ... your market but, like, what they are going to want. ... Like, I knew with this guy because, you know, he introduced me, like, he talked to me for ... a while and we drank, we had a good chat. ... I knew that something that would make him attracted to me was me being able to, you know, be well spoken and be funny and stuff like that, whereas I know a guy who would just approach me and just be like "oh my god you're so hot." ... I know that, like, you know pop a titty out, get it going, ... it would be easier (laughs). (Lola)

Like Chloe, her previous negotiation of the field of heterosexual relationships has provided her with a practiced understanding of what her different clients are wanting from an interaction.

McDermott (2011) attempts to pair queer theory and Bourdieu's (1972/1977) Theory of Practice to create a more useful model to understand the classed experience of LGBT youth. Within this, she states that:

There is a tension between Bourdieu's notion of habitus as complicit with the dominant symbolic order and queer theory's view of the unstable nature of sexual identities. Bourdieu's (1991) version of symbolic power relies on the supposition that the habitus of dominated groups veils the conditions of their subordination through a process of misrecognition. A central component of this theory is the unconsciousness of habitus: an unconscious complicity between habitus and the field which does not allow for resistance to the symbolic order. Skeggs (2004b) argues that for the women in her research, gender was not prereflexive, unconscious and based on misrecognition but that gender was a classed experience of which the women were very aware and critical; they were resisting the dominant values. (McDermott, 2011, p. 67).

Similarly, I argue that the lesbian sex worker habitus is a conscious, reflexive agent. I argue here that that sex workers – and queer sex workers, in particular – have greater awareness of their identities, perceived and otherwise, and they engage in deeper identity work than the general population. Not only are participants aware of their position as "woman" but, further, the positions of "sex worker" and "queer woman" create increased awareness.

To have an 'othered' sexual identity, is to overcome the fundamental gender binary, argued by feminist/queer theorists and Bourdieu as the earliest and most powerful and durable aspects of socialization/habitus. The recognition of not 'being like other girls/boys or women/men' requires a conscious acknowledgement of 'inappropriate' erotic feelings, desires or acts. This raises questions about the relationship of consciousness and habitus, and reflexivity and identity. (McDermott, 2011, p. 68).

April, on the other hand, talks about this performance of heterosexual woman being easier for straight women as they know what straight men want to hear. However, she finds she can only successfully perform that sexuality through the "digital wall" of a screen which gives her time to curate her performance of sexuality: "When I put the digital wall between me and them, I can sort of, you know, stop, have a think how would someone who was interested in this actually respond" (April).

““Bi for pay” – Manipulation of the real queer identity for work

None of the participants disclosed the entirety of their sexual identities within their performances at work. While some developed a comfortable relationship with “regulars” which allowed them to be more truthful about relationship status or sexual identity, others chose to capitalise on the way that queer women’s identities are inherently sexualised and viewed as overly sexual in contemporary society by presenting themselves as bisexual. April, who does live performances at parties with her female partner as well as having an online profile on *OnlyFans*, described an interaction that she had between herself, her partner, and two private clients the night before.

I’ve got it listed that I’m in a relationship...it’s reasonably open but it’s not just like “oh hi I’m a lesbian” ... I think that kills sort of the fantasy that I was discussing about ... that they can possibly have sex with me and that’s something, you know, when it comes to bookings and stuff, I think it gives an authenticity. ... If you hire us for a lesbian show to do your bucks show, you’re going to be getting girls that are super into it, like the show we did last night. ... We got paid just to make out and they were like, “oh you guys are really enjoying that,” and I’m like, “yeh, we are literally a genuine couple,” and they’re like, “Oh! Does that mean we can like do more?” ... So sometimes I find that it works in my favour and if I feel that people are leaning towards like “oh that’s great you’re gonna do more than that,” then I’ll be like, “oh yeh we actually are a couple and we are into each other”. But otherwise, I’ll be like, “oh yeh I’m straight and...this is... *gay for pay*” and like, “oh this is so naughty I can’t believe I’m doing this!” ... So it all depends on the client that’s there and what they’re thinking. ... I’m pretty good at reading people that I can just be, like, yeh ok, ... you guys want the little, like, “gay experience” or whatever, or you actually want me to actually be gay. So it sorta just depends! (April)

April has gained the skills to know which performance of sexuality a client is wanting, thus, showing a high level of IWC. In this way, she is able to convert IWC to economic capital by using elements of her real sexual identity. This seems more successful than when she is attempting to perform as heterosexual, as she described in the last section.

Amy has a sound understanding of the way she is performing sexuality in the field of sex work. In this excerpt, she positions her role as slightly different to her “actual authentic self”:

I like to say homoflexible in my personal life. ... I don’t date men, but I do, on occasion, sleep with men in my personal life, but not very often. I’m attracted to some men. I think I don’t identify as a lesbian cos I don’t feel exclusively attracted to women, but I don’t identify as bisexual either so I find that kind of annoying to have to do so performatively ... for clients and on the internet. But that’s the best way I’ve managed to be able to, I dunno, be authentically my authentic self, which is slightly differently to my actual authentic self (laughs).

I think my clients are super... I wouldn’t say into it, I have really good regs that are actually a bunch of really respectful guys. (Amy)

Because she chooses to share intimate details of her life, such as photographs of her partner on her social media, Amy’s clients perceive her performance as authenticity. This authenticity

translates into capital in the form of repeat bookings and material gifts, such as birthday presents and cash that clients send to her and also her girlfriend. Amy explains that these gifts were “no strings attached”, meaning that they were not directly a payment for her sexual service.

They all love her as this character on my social media as well, which is so strange! Like, I didn't think they would ... she's trans as well, so I was, like, oh, will that be off putting or weird to them? You know, I don't know ... but it all seems to not matter. I think it all adds to their feeling like they really know who I am even though they don't quite [actually know who I am]. (Amy)

In contrast to Amy's experience, for some participants, a displeasing feeling of vulnerability occurred when they revealed parts of their real sexuality, and this prevented them from taking advantage of a potential asset. Ava, for example, learnt that she did not feel comfortable revealing such intimate details about her life.

There were a few clients where I'd say I'm in a relationship with a woman, or ... try on letting little parts of my identity slip out. And it never felt very good for me after because it comes with a lot of questions or, “oh are you enjoying this”, like, “why are you doing this? Are you even enjoying this?” Oh, “how was that compared to this?” and I'm just like “oh god, its actually just none of your business”. And it would make me irritable. (Ava)

Data presented here has aligned with the theory that lesbian sex workers use conscious efforts of identity creation, different to their identity used outside of their working life, as a form of capital. The following accounts further illustrate this separation of selves.

Efforts to separate identity between sex work and home life

In Chapter Three, I examined the widely researched strategy of separation employed by sex workers to maintain their wellbeing, whilst accumulating whore stigma. Many authors have found that separation of self from a work persona was a key strategy used by sex workers (Kooy, 1998; Sanders, 2005; Abel, 2011). I argue here, however, that separation of identities is not a strategy used purely to maintain emotional wellbeing, but also occurs due to a recognition of client expectations, and how they differ from a sex worker's personal self. For Harmony, a full-service worker in Adelaide, separation of identities was overt and purposeful:

People who know ... what I do, who I work with, that I see outside of work, I'm really clear with them that they need to call me by my real name outside of work ... and my working name inside of work, I'm really big on it. ... Cos I just feel like I need to separate those two identities. ... I'm not Harmony ... outside of there, that's purely a character for me. ... So I find that's a really big way for me to separate it, by making sure that, yeh, I keep those identities separate. ... The character that I put on for work is just so different from who I am, which is just, it's so amazing when clients, they fall in love. (Harmony)

As discussed above in the first section of this chapter, Harmony referred to her sex work persona in third person during our interview as did others. Some participants chose to use their working names for the purpose of the interviews so this third person they are naming is actually their work persona. At times, during the interview process with participants more broadly, it was hard to keep track of whether the separation of identities was a true reflection of participants' feelings or was influenced by the way they described themselves for the purpose of the interview – an implication of research via interviews, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Participants created separate clothing wardrobes, used wigs and specific makeup, and even perfumes to partition their physical presentation. The embodied experience is discussed further in the next chapter, where these physical markers will be addressed more thoroughly. The visual research method used created an opportunity for participants to show the embodied way these identities were defined. All participants were given two copies of their chosen doll figure and invited to stick one on each of the two provided backgrounds. One background represented a phone screen displaying a dating app to illustrate the way a participant may present themselves to the queer community, whilst the other depicted a brothel waiting room scene complete with a stripper pole and chaise lounge, where participants were invited to construct a representation of their sex worker selves. Participants were given the option of completing one, both, or even a third blank background, depending on what they felt necessary to explain their physical "selves". Most participants' dolls illustrated a striking difference between the ways in which they presented themselves physically for a queer audience and in their sex work lives. Again, these physical differences will be discussed further in a later chapter, but what was more unexpected about the paper doll exercise, is the way that participants endeavoured to show immaterial qualities of the separate dolls. Interesting examples included E and Ava. E, who advertised herself as BBW (Big Beautiful Woman) and worked as a full-service sex worker in Adelaide, included a speech bubble with the words, "What a nice cock", and a contradictory thought bubble stating, "Ew" in her sex worker depiction. She described this as the difference between her inner monologue and the attitude she is hoping to portray to a client.

Ava took the use of text to another level, almost covering the background around both dolls. On her queer self, Ava wrote, "Beer <3, 32, Graphic Design, Women, Briefs, authentic, Scottish, Vegan, I go to the bathroom because I am human, Booring. Are you still talking?" In contrast, her sex worker self was surrounded by the words, "Cocktails and wine, lingerie, cute, French, 24, Men, Student (external), I don't eat, I go to the bathroom to powder my nose, I'm so interested... tell me

more!". Ava used these words to show that almost every part of her sex worker self was a fabrication and contradictory to her real self. As previously discussed, Ava remarked that she found sex work with female clients incredibly difficult because of challenges in maintaining the separation of her queer identity from her work identity. This occurred despite Ava beginning work in the sex industry via her girlfriend of the time, who was already working in the industry.

While all participants were advised to use a name that would protect their anonymity, whether that be a name they worked under or something different, Frankie, who used that name in a variety of contexts, chose to label her dolls as "Frankie" and "Lexi" (Lexi being a name she has worked under). The dolls had notably different outfits, hairstyles, and makeup, but there were also other differences. "Frankie" is depicted with an aura of pink love hearts and stars floating around her head, while "Lexi" wears all black, and is surrounded by tiny black ghosts and stars. Frankie described her two characters as being almost unrecognisable from each other. She explained that in her "real life", she is timid and anxious, however, her work persona as a dominatrix demands that she "pump herself up" to get into a headspace where she is able to physically hurt clients. Frankie said she employs a ritual when getting ready for work which includes listening to aggressive music to get into the required headspace.

Charlie spoke about a "layer" that she had developed over time working in the industry. This layer fulfilled two purposes; it acted as a barrier between what Charlie felt was her real self and the client experience, and it also represented what she had learnt her male clients expected of her and "working it for the circumstances". Here, Charlie's habitus had developed over time to succeed in the field of sex work. Charlie also considered that sex work may be easier as a queer woman due to the vast separation between her personal desires and the sex she participated in at work. She felt that the performance of a heterosexual woman was so far removed from her personal life that it was easier to act. Similarly, Ava suggested that being queer helped to "naturally create those boundaries".

Chloe, who worked in the erotic massage industry, which generally means long bookings and a more established relationship between herself and regular clients, felt that continuing to separate her identity between her home and work life became difficult and was destabilising at times. She described this occurring when she was "particularly stressed in other areas of ... life":

My mental health hasn't been great, ... I've struggled with my identity ... if I haven't been strong in myself at a particular point in time since working in sex work. Because sometimes you do feel disassociated. Sometimes ... you're there and you're, like, you know who am I, like "yeh I'm

Chloe” but ... I’m definitely acting. There’s a big part of acting but it’s an interesting topic when you start seeing regulars. This ... happened to me recently. It’s like I unconsciously start letting my guard down a bit and, like, start letting out personal information about myself, and then suddenly you’re like this cross between Chloe and the real you and ... it’s like you’re not one and you’re not the other; you’re this mismatched of the two, the two identities, and then you can sometimes go away and feel really, like, well.. who am I? Like, ya know? And I felt in those times I’ve really had to like ground myself and [exercise] a lot of self-care and a lot of ... reflection and talking to people in the industry. ... Yeh cos it can be a bit, a bit challenging. (Chloe)

Sanders (2005) previously found Goffman’s (1959) “performance of the self” useful in understanding the “manufactured identity” used by sex workers as a self-preservation strategy. Sanders (2005) argued that identity performances serve the dual role of appealing to the market and masking a true self. The benefit of Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) Theory of Practice, as opposed to Goffman’s (1959) performance of the self, is the distinct separation between fields. Many participants described performance and conscious tactics, not only within the field of sex work, but across other fields as well, including queer relationships and communities. Charlie, for example, identified that her aim, in both her work persona and her queer community persona, was to “blend in” to each community. Working as a private escort attending events, she strove to look like a “normal woman” and, in contrast, when attending queer events, she wanted to flag that she was also a queer person. Talking about the way she dressed to present to both different groups, Charlie said that:

When I’m seeing clients and working, like, I want to blend in a little bit more [as] a normal straight ... girl. Whereas ... when you’re queer and you’re going out into the queer community you want to blend in. (Charlie)

So, we see here that Charlie’s presentation at work is not simply a “manufactured identity” that is masking a true self, but that elements of her presentation to the queer community are also performed. As Bourdieu (1980/1990) would understand it, Charlie has both a conscious and a subconscious understanding of the rules of the game and what is necessary to “blend in” to each community. This aligns with Butler’s assertion that:

Performativity is ... a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate, and constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged. (Butler, 1993, p. 22)

All but one participant chose to complete the visual craft activity in the way it was designed using the two backgrounds. V, however, pondered the craft activity for some time before articulating that she struggled to see herself as different across her queer identity and sex work identity. V had worked in a number of different independent roles within the sex industry. Rather than working

for a brothel or a strip club, she had performed in online porn, agency work – such as topless waitressing and lesbian shows for events such as buck’s parties – and now focused on her online work and party bookings with her partner. Reflecting on the difference between her experience and many other participants who had a more structured workday, I asked V if she felt there was less of a boundary between her personal and work life.

Ah definitely! ... There’s a fine line sometimes, cos it’s just like, it is harder cos it’s ... [not] just going to work and then going home, blah blah blah. It’s like you have to be messaging people, you have to be trying to like find customers, you have to be like advertising, you have to be like posting stuff, you have to be like talking to them like you’re really into stuff. ... You know what I mean? It’s like, “I’m really excited, I really want to catch up!”

It is kinda weird sometimes. ... Say you’re at a party and ... you’re having a really good time, but it’s like, I’m also at work, so ... I need to stay professional, I can’t get too drunk, I can’t enjoy myself too much. (V)

When asked if she could identify any strategies used to create a separation between her personal identity and her work life, V responded:

I used to try and have more of a work persona where it would be, like, ok, I’ll just switch off, like I’m not really gonna be myself. I’m just gonna, like, you know, do my thing and just leave it at that, but it’s kind of hard to maintain and ... I don’t want to go down that rabbit hole of ... pretending to be someone I’m not. ... I try to just be chill. I try to just have a good time and, guys respond to that, like they appreciate that. I even tell a lot of people, “yeh, you know, I’m a lesbian” and they’re like, “ugh that’s so fuckin’ hot”. ... I feel like I don’t have to lie about a lot of things which is good, but obviously keep myself as anonymous as possible, like, I don’t talk about anything of my personal life, anything like that. I just try to keep my personality like how I am cos I think ... I’m fairly chill and stuff like that. ... I’m not gonna be that really bubbly girl or that real like hustler girl, or anything like that. ... I’m just here to be me and try to make the most of it and see how it goes. ... Dudes seem to respond to that decently enough. (V)

V sees her authenticity as an asset and something that increases her whore capital (similar to Amy’s experience above). Being “fairly chill”, rather than adopting a persona as V thinks other workers may do, becomes a deliberate strategy to increase connection between herself and clients, and increase her earnings. She continues:

It’s not like I’m having to, like, punch in for work or anything like that. ... I’m just here to make some extra money and ... I want to have a good time! Like, at the end of the day that’s ... a big part of it. (V)

V decided that to complete the visual aspect of the research, she would create one doll rather than two, this better representing the way she sees her identity. On the background, she drew a house, and she labelled the doll figure “real me”. V decorated her figure with emerald green skimpy lingerie and coloured the body in with her many tattoos. Next to the doll, she stuck a shirt and skirt labelled “work me”. For V, her day job working in a government agency was a field

entirely separate from the rest of her life and identity. In this job, where she is required to adopt a conservative demeanour, her main objective when dressing is to “blend in”: “ I do go to my day job. I have, like, work me who is very different to real me and, in this office, I’m not super myself”.

We see here that V does, in fact, exist in more than one field: There is a government job in which her habitus endeavours to “blend in” by wearing “officey” clothes which she loathes. This field has parallels to the self that is accepted by her conservative, “traditional” Greek family. The field of casual sex work, in comparison, aligns more closely with her lesbian sexuality, something that she also keeps separate and largely hidden from her government co-workers and family members. Within this field, she can be her “everywhere else me”. For V, then, the strategy of less separation has two benefits: it brings her more financial success because it gives her clients what she feels they want from her, and it enables her to feel authentic, which, in aligning more closely with her values, is important for her mental wellbeing. V’s “natural” capacity to present as traditionally attractive, white, and able-bodied, together with her carefree persona, mean that her habitus has an advantage in the field of sex work. For her, sex work is neither a full-time job nor a career; rather, it is something that she engages in as a way to express parts of herself that are not welcome in other areas of her life. Having a good time seems to be almost as important as financial gain to V, reminiscent of the “anti-work” strategy that Colosi (2010) found in her research with lap dancers.

The separation strategies enacted by participants show that, for most, the sex work field required a habitus to develop distinct dispositions separate from those required in other spaces occupied by lesbian and queer women. As the exception, V instead separated her life into different but equally distinct fields: her government job and conservative family as one, and her sex work and queer self (the deviant) as another. For all other participants, despite similarities between the two roles, there was a clear distinction between the persona they occupied in their sex work, and who they were in the queer community, with partners, and by themselves. Later, I will further discuss these conflicting fields of practice and how a habitus adjusts over both.

Heteronorm subversion – an easier pathway to sex worker identity?

From the limited existing scholarship, we know that lesbians and queer women are overrepresented in the sex industry (Perkins, 1991; Perkins & Lovejoy, 2007; Lyons et al., 2014). While a few authors have made suggestions about the reasons for this, discussed in detail in the literature review, here I explore in depth the *relationship between* both identity categories. The

overrepresentation of queer sex workers in certain settings, in itself, will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

I assert that, for lesbian and queer sex workers, identity construction is impacted by the two forms of sexuality discourse in which they are situated. Their sexuality (or sexual identity) is informed by their subversion from heterosexuality in a society where heterosexuality remains the default, the norm, and the majority. This has been described as “compulsory heterosexuality” by Adrienne Rich (1980), and is evident in the way that participants were able to articulate their understanding of the way that their sexuality affects their position in society. At the same time, their work in the sex industry creates an opportunity for them to identify as a sex worker. As discussed in Chapter Two, not every person who participates in the sex industry chooses to self-identify as a sex worker. Regardless of whether individuals choose the term “sex worker” to define themselves, their identity, and, indeed, their sexual identity, they are not immune to the discourse of stigma that surrounds people who provide sexual services for money. The data collected in this study show that the intersection of these two elements of identity has a significant effect on identity work for participants. Above, I discussed how a queer identity enables the sex worker to perfect the role-playing necessary for positive client interactions. Later in this chapter, I analyse the experiences of whore stigma for participants. Here, I ask how participants’ sexual identities impact their other experiences of sex work outside of their ability to role-play, and, in turn, the following section asks how sex work impacts the participants’ sexuality.

Chloe, who had entered the industry in the field of erotic massage five months prior to the interview, was already known to me in a personal capacity. This brought some familiarity to our discussion as we explored the similarities in our journeys through sexuality and sex work. In our earlier lives, we had both dated men exclusively, and identified as straight before coming out as queer and entering the sex industry with a predominantly male clientele. I asked Chloe whether she thought sex work was easier as a queer woman with this life experience:

I feel that, yeh, that is a thing for me because ... I’m not interested in guys in an emotional, sexual, physical kind of way, so for me it really is a definitive line of this is just a job. ...Whereas with the other girls there that are straight or, you know, there are girls there that are married or ... in long term relationships with cis men – I’m currently not with anyone – but, like, in discussions of them being in relationships, it seems very problematic ... because there’s obviously sort of a [male] ego. You know, you’re with a male and you’re doing this stuff with a male. ... I think [for] the girls as well it can be a little bit confusing. ... I mean, not all clients are shit, like, a lot of them are actually attractive in one way or another, it might not be physically but it could be, like, mentally. ... I definitely get that as well, like, I feel that. As much as I don’t want to be with a male, I can appreciate ... a decent person. ... I would say it is easier [as a queer sex worker] in some ways. Hard in others, but it was more initially, because I felt like ... I didn’t have the game

anymore with men ... so I wasn't used to [it]. ... It's a bit of a hustle ... and you're, like, trying to be this person that is going to be desirable to a male and because the dynamic of my intimate relationships have been with women [for] the last few years, ..., there's quite a shift in how you act, or how I felt that I would act to ... impress [male clients]. (Chloe)

Chloe continued to talk about feeling like there was always an element of acting in her previous heterosexual relationships which gave her some skills and insight about how to be “this sexualised kind of object ... to attract male attention”. Similarly, Erin, a transgender sex worker who had previously identified as a bisexual man, said that sex work became simpler when she realised she was a lesbian and not sexually attracted to men.

And that was when I was like, ok so I'm a woman who loves women, I'm a lesbian, and increasingly ... throughout transitioning, ... I've been able to form more healthy relationships. I've had a kind of weird experience with sex work, whereas, like, now that I know that I hate men, ... not that that's a universal experience of lesbianism, ... it's just mine, but now that I know that I'm not attracted to men, now that I know that, like, there's nothing there for me, I actually find sex work a fuckin lot easier. ... I think before when I was entertaining the idea that there were some men that I could be attracted to and the fact that I was always kind of repulsed and disgusted, aside from the fact that ... there's not that much that's necessarily enjoyable about sex work because it's just fucking awkward at times. Now that I can just go and be ... completely detached from this experience, there is nothing for me here, I am basically just coasting along on their inertia. It's actually kind of made sex work a little bit easier for me. (Erin)

When I proposed that perhaps lesbians found it easier to separate the sex within work from the sex in our personal lives, Erin continued:

At work, I'm less invested, so ... there's less pain, there's less confusion. And at home I'm more supported and I'm more nurtured and I don't feel as though ... either of those experiences [are] interacting with one another [in a way] that's harmful. (Erin)

Erin's insight into the difference between her “straight” relationships and her relationships with queer women (both romantic and platonic), and the impact of this on her wellbeing, will be explored further in Chapter Seven. M, who had worked as an exotic dancer, had a great respect for the straight women she worked with and felt that she could not perform for a female clientele in the same way.

I felt ... quite shy to, even like the girl gonna get on stage or, like, have a show, I'm still like, “oh I can't” ... I feel like I can't even give a lap dance to a girl, especially a hot girl. I feel like this is hard but when [it's] with the man I feel, “oh, don't give a shit, come on”. But when [it's a] girl, ... [I] can't even look at them, oh it's too hard! Urgh, yeh, I dunno how the straight girl can do it! (M)

Non-heterosexual women are already subverting the heteronorm, and deviating from the expected path of heterosexual woman – that is, the identity of the lesbian woman is implicitly tainted (E. Payne, 2015). As such, the choice to enter the sex industry and risk further stigma may become easier. Put simply, they do not have a normative sexuality to lose. V's account shows how

heteronormative assumptions forced her to a point of “accepting” that she is not attracted to men:

Ooh that one’s a more difficult one, cos for a while I was identifying more as bisexual, cos I was still engaging in sex with men more. But then I just kind of realised ... it’s not for me, you know? I’m trying to make it work and I’m trying to make it fit, but it’s probably in the last year or so when I’ve been, like, no actually I think I’m just a lesbian (laughs) ... and there’s nothing wrong with that. Like, you know, just accept it... (laughs) I’ve given it a go, I’ve really given it a go. It’s just not for me! ... it did take quite a little bit, but yeh, we are good now. (V)

She shows a level of introspection regarding her relationships and a reflexivity about her sexuality that may not have been necessary had she continued into heteronormative adulthood and not entered the sex industry. The way that heteronormative behaviours had shaped her sexual behaviour became apparent once she was being paid for sexual interactions with men, and she was able to question these behaviours with a new sense of consciousness.

It’s a weird thing to, like, try and explain it. ... I dunno, I just feel like working in this kind of industry made me realise that the only reason I was trying to appeal to men is cos that’s just how you grow up, you know what I mean? .. Everyone’s just like, “oh you know you’ve gotta be hot, you need a boyfriend, ... you want guys to think you’re attractive, blah blah blah” and then ... having sex with dudes not as a job was always just kind of like, you know, going with the motions anyway, so moving into [sex work] and kind of doing it more job wise, it just kind of felt the same where it’s like, I’m just going with the motions. ... I’m not actually enjoying anything so, you know, why am I doing it and not getting anything, you know what I mean? Like, not even getting paid for it, like, why am I doing this? (V)

Just as V describes “going with the motions”, Lola talks about “doing it cos ... I can” in her previous heterosexual relationships. This was, in part, due to her rural location and lack of exposure to sexual diversity.

Until, yeh, maybe this year, yeh. ... Before I moved [to the city], especially ... in my home town, I was very ... active in that sense, but kind of didn’t understand what the hype was about. I was more just doing it cos I was like, well I can! And, yeh, once I kind of came to ... a bigger city and [there’s] obviously a lot more, like, diversity [here], ... I had no gravitation towards any guys whatsoever, so I kind of figured like there might be a reason for that (laughs). (Lola)

Paton found sex with men traumatising and, similar to the above accounts, continued this until her first experience with a woman when she felt she had experienced “what sex is” for the first time:

I’ve had a lot of experiences with men. I’ve been with men my whole life, [and] only with women very recently. Probably about three years ago [I] slept with a woman for the first time, and kind of knew, like, “yeh right! This is what sex is!” Yep, I was quite traumatised by sex with men, to be honest, and just never felt, sex never felt right. I felt violated after every time. ... I felt like even though I verbally consented, I wasn’t consenting in my heart and my body. Nothing felt right and I always felt like an actress. (Paton)

These accounts show the effect that heteronormativity has on the “rules of the game” in contemporary Australian society. These women followed the heteronormative script available to them. At the same time, the pressure and expectations from within the queer community can also impact the experience of queer sex workers, as discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Being part of a minority sexual identity has a great impact on the habitus, leading to more overt identity work than what is experienced by those who fit the sexual norms of the culture. For example, in saying that “I go out of my way to dress ... like a lesbian”, Harmony asserts that she knows the way that lesbians dress. In other words, she has the cultural capital, the knowledge of what is required to assert herself as a lesbian. Non-normative sexuality communities, such as lesbian or queer communities, although subordinated to the heteronorm, become strong cultural groups whose boundaries are rigorously policed to avoid infiltration by outsiders (see Logan, 2013; Earles, 2019). Chapter Seven will engage further with the boundary-policing within these communities and seek to understand the whorephobia that occurs inside non-normative communities. In the following narratives, participants describe the depth of the effect of a non-normative sexual identity on their sense of selves. They also show increased focus on identity work.

For participants, their queer identity was a large part of their lives, with struggle, joy, conviction, and confusion all a part of their experience. Here, Alexa describes the way that she currently understands her sexuality. During the interview, Alexa became noticeably upset when speaking about a recent relationship breakdown with a heterosexual man.

I identify as bisexual, but then, I dunno. I've always struggled with my identity; kind of just because it's just really hard ... having both sides and sort of always feeling like I'm not being true. ... If I like one person then, oh, I just must be like that. ... So I just really struggle with ... the identity aspect. (Alexa)

Understanding Alexa's account of her struggle of identifying as bisexual requires an awareness of the experience of being bisexual in a world that sees everything, including sexuality, as binary (Bradford, 2004). The stigma associated with the label of bisexuality has been well documented (Jen, 2019) and will be further discussed in Chapter Seven. Here, it is important to understand that bi-negative stereotypes include the idea that bisexual people are promiscuous or overly sexual (Dyar et al., 2017). Alexa spoke at length about the struggles she feels with “claiming” a queer identity and engaging with the queer community.

It just feels like I'm being really disingenuous with the label "bisexual". I could just be like a straight person just invading everybody's spaces or something like that. ... I've like held off a lot on perhaps being a part of a community or really identifying myself as that. I feel like sex work feels more like solid. Like, I've done a sexual act and then I've received money for it So it feels a lot more like I can stake a claim on that without having it ... feel like I'm invading a space in that kind of sense. (Alexa)

I asked if Alexa felt that her hesitation to "claim" queerness was tied to bisexuality being seen as a less legitimate sexuality:

Yeh ... I've, like, been with women but then ... everything just feels like it could just be, like, I dunno, like a phase, or like a thing. But then ... most of the relationships or ... most of the ... building ... trust and stuff, like, that has been with guys and not with women. And it's also just because I feel like there's a lot of, like, probably insecurity in my identity as well, because then ... I won't even, like, try because what if I ... go, like, "mmm no, ... I've just discovered I'm straight" and I don't want to, I don't want to have to put that out there. And then I was ... talking to a woman and then we sort of ended up ... fizzling out and then I went to a guy afterwards and I was like, ugh god, now I just look like I just flirted with this woman, like just ... took up all of her time and then just went back to a guy, and I just, I dunno. I feel likemaybe it would be helpful if I had a community to talk to about that kind of stuff (laughs). (Alexa)

Alexa's realisation about how her lack of community affects the way she is able to understand her own identity shows how, for queer people, the existence of a community of peers is an important factor in working out where we fit in the world. So, while the labels of queer or bisexual seem risky for Alexa, her identity as a sex worker is a solid label that she can "stake a claim on" without perceived or real repercussions.

April talks about the way that straight-passing privilege is a double-edged sword for her, making her invisible in the queer community, but concurrently masking her lesbian identity within her day job where she is assumed straight. This shows that April is aware of the threat of homophobia and is willing to use heteronormativity to protect herself from it.

So I just sort of use that as a bit of a cover and be like, "oh me and my girlfriend went and did this" and they think I'm just taking about a friend. Because I'm straight appearing. ... I've always found it hard to meet girls. ... I'm sort of stuck with that, you know, stigma of being straight which isn't the worst thing cos it's got a point of privilege of being a straight white woman in an industry that's full of straight white women. (April)

April expressed that she did not really identify with the queer community, and did not feel included in it, which contributed to her taking longer to feel comfortable with claiming a queer identity.

I find that I don't identify with it as much cos I'm a bit more relaxed about everything ... I don't give a shit about going out and doing all these marches and whatever, like, cos I am from a position of privilege, I guess, as well. Which, you know, is probably something I need to self-reflect on. ... I just find that a lot of the stuff doesn't resonate with me as much as it does with

[other] people in the queer community ... so that's why I've found that I've never had to go out and really seek it. I've got a pretty good support group within the non queer community of being surrounded by sex workers who understand what I'm doing and can relate to me in that way. ... People that are queer sex workers that I know, I know that they're there and they're a good support to me, but it's not a group I've actively got around me. (April)

April felt her issues with fitting in with the queer community stem from her appearance as a feminine woman, or a femme, rather than being a sex worker.

Yeh, I think its more so about ... the femme presenting part of it and ... the fact that I don't really acknowledge my privilege the best some of the time. So, I think that's sort of something that I don't really look into too much and I know that that's such a big thing for people in the queer community sometimes. That I'm just a bit blasé and a bit ... careless about it. But, yeh, its more so that than anything to do with sex work.

The exclusion of femme women and femmephobia perpetrated by the queer community is discussed further in Chapter Seven. Elyse's narrative of her experience as a femme woman is relevant here, as I argue that when the habitus is already marked as deviant, the pathway to sex work is easier. For Elyse, being a feminine presenting queer woman meant that choosing sex work seemed like a logical pathway. Needing to be financially self-sufficient after being kicked out of home, she described homophobia in an office job which led to her working in a budget shoe store.

I remember so clearly, 'cause it was like "back-to-school" and it was just, like, kids getting their shoes. And I worked there for like two months, and literally halfway through a shift I was ... up a ladder and I was, like, "absolutely the fuck no". And just got down the ladder and got my bag and, like, left. Halfway through my shift, I was just, like, "I can't ... I'm actually really smart and beautiful and fuck this". (Elyse)

She recalls a desire to work in the sex industry from a young age, an obsession with popular depictions of burlesque, and a joke from her comedian friend that discusses whether a whore is "made or born":

she's like, "you just come out of the womb wanting that level of attention ... And validation and money" ... Just, like, no! I want a certain standard of life, like, I don't want to live pay cheque to pay cheque, or not be able to leave my husband cause he sucks. (Elyse)

Although she knew little about the realities of the sex industry in comparison to the other employment options available to her, it seemed appealing. She "called the place nearest to [her] house and had a crack".

I lost my virginity to the trans guy I was dating, specifically so I could go work. I hadn't had sex with a man, ever. ... My first experience ... with a cis guy was in a parlour. ... I'd had boyfriends in high school. I'd, like, given blow jobs and stuff like that, but I wouldn't ever let them have sex with me 'cause I knew that was, like, a huge bargaining chip. (Elyse)

Elyse's narrative elegantly portrays the learnings of her habitus of what is expected of women in a heteronormative society. Female sexuality and, in particular, the decision to perform sex acts become powerful capital in the field of relations between men and women. Elyse shows a clear reflexive understanding of the capital tied to her sexuality and has become a master at converting this erotic capital into fiscal capital.

I wouldn't even call it work. It's always been, like, transactional, ... or a game? Like, I've just always found it, like, so funny the stuff guys will do for your attention, ... all the stuff you can get away with. Like, I'm notorious for never having paid a tram fine, ...for never having bought my own drugs. ... Do you know what you can get away with if you play nice and you smile? And a huge part of me hates that. ... I want absolutely nothing more than to, like, push you all (men) into traffic, ... I guess while we're living under these conditions, I'm not gonna suffer, when I could not suffer. That always seems pretty basic to me. ... If you grew up conventionally feminine, you didn't know you were queer until later in life, and you have so much of that conditioning and they just have no idea. ... If you didn't grow up having the full heterosexual girl experience of, like, ballet classes and boyfriends, you weren't very obviously gay as a seven-year-old so other girls were nice to you, like, you have no idea how deep it goes. ...It would feel just as costumey for me ... to do something else you know? ... Sex with cis straight men has ... never been emotional. ... It's always been, yeh, a means to an end, or a game. (Elyse)

It is evident that contemporary Western society is a more tolerant world than the one in which Rubin (1984) wrote about in her famous piece, *Thinking Sex*. Rubin articulated the hierarchy of acceptable sex in mid-80s America and declared "transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists" to be alongside sex workers at the bottom of the acceptability pyramid, with "bar dykes and promiscuous gay men" hovering dangerously above them (Rubin, 1984, p. 200). Two decades later, commenting on contemporary possibilities for sexual minority groups, Weeks states that:

We are living ... in a world of transition, in the midst of a long, convoluted, messy, unfinished but profound revolution that has transformed the possibilities of living our sexual diversity and creating intimate lives. (Weeks, 2007, p. X).

Some authors go as far as to suggest that we are living in a "post-gay" society (Savin-Williams, 2005; Ghaziani, 2014). Ghaziani (2014), for instance, found that sexual identity and, in particular, the importance of sexuality labels, was no longer a central aspect of younger queer people's lives. He suggests that, in contemporary America, gay people are "culturally assimilated" into broader society. But despite policy progress, such as the marriage equality laws achieved in Australia in 2017, the participant accounts here clearly show that an individual's status as lesbian and queer has a profound impact on the way that they move about the world and their daily experiences. As I write in October 2021, a leaked document has come to light, promising that, if elected, the Victorian Liberal Party will roll back a ban on gay conversion therapy that came into effect earlier

this year (S. Thomas, 2021), presenting a powerful and vengeful threat to the wellbeing of non-heterosexual and transgender people and communities, Australia wide.

The decline in the use of the word “lesbian” has also been purported to point to a decline in relevance of sexuality identity for young people. The participants’ narratives about the importance of sexuality identity, however, align with recent findings that discomfort or disdain for the use of the word lesbian, as previously discussed, does not occur due to irrelevance (or a post-gay society), but, instead, results from perceptions of exclusion and “old yet persisting stigmas” linked to the term (Giacomuzzi & Tal, 2022, p. 54). As Ussher and Mooney-Somers state:

To be a dyke is to be deemed infused with sexuality, indeed to be defined by desire – albeit deviant desire – in representations found in popular culture, film and pornography. Self-identification as a dyke is also tied to desire: for many, desire marks the moment of departure from the default option of heterosexuality. (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000, p. 183)

This section has shown the importance of self-identification for sexual minority women, and the relationship between a sexual minority identity and experience as a sex worker. Many participants discussed their conscious decisions to “come out” as both or either of these identities (queer and sex worker) and how this can be context specific. Discussions of coming out and the impact on relationships will be addressed later in this thesis. Cassie, who spoke about coming from a cultural background that positions homosexuality as shameful, showed the considered way that she approaches her self-identification.

I guess [it] took a long time for me to sort of come to ... terms, like, with my sexuality and ... just a year and a half later I was like, you know what? Whatever I decide to label myself, whether that’s bisexual or lesbian, I’m still gonna have the feelings of who I have feelings for so I’m not gonna try and work it out. (Cassie)

Cassie’s account brings to mind Payne’s (2015) observation that, by defying heteronormative expectations, lesbians are already jeopardising their social capital.

Understanding how young lesbians navigate the social world requires an understanding of more than their romantic attractions and sexual identities – it requires an understanding of the ways in which they position themselves in the world given the loss of social capital that comes from having a culturally deviant sexuality and deviant gender. (E. Payne, 2015, p. 236)

“I think stripping made me much more gay”

Earlier, I looked at the gendered sexual “performance”. This section will look at the impact of sex work on participants’ own sexual identities, the conflicting fields of practice, and how a habitus adjusts over both. In other words, I will address the perceived incompatibility of lesbianism and

heterosexual sex work, destabilisation of participants' sexual identities due to this clash, and argue that working within the sex industry can have a significant effect on queer women's experience of their own sexuality identity.

Some participants felt that sex work had very little impact on their personal sexuality, for example, E: "I mean there's vegetarian chefs that cook meat. ... So, it's just a job, yeh". For others, the job of sex work had a profound impact on their experience of their sexuality outside of work – their felt identities and their sexual practices. For Chloe, working in exotic massage meant that she felt she was not able to express or explore her queer identity. Chloe talked about discovering her queerness through relationships with transgender men in her late twenties, however, her recent entry into the sex industry had meant some significant issues when trying to date women and queer people.

I feel like my queer identity is a little bit on hold in a way at the moment – not, not on hold in terms of, you know, I'll still casually date and whatever, but ... it's more complicated. ... As I said, I'm still sort of navigating it as to how to make it all work. If there was a way it was less complex, I would... yeh I dunno. Yeh, no I still have the queer identity. (Chloe)

Many participants expressed particular interest in the research project due to their own reflection on this topic. Lola expressed a strong interest in reading about the impact of sex work on non-heterosexual identities and how other queer identifying sex workers navigate this space.

The most interesting part for me would be how people felt their sexualities have maybe transformed or been affected by sex work. Cos usually when I'm talking to, like, my queer friends who do sex work, that's usually what I talk about. I remember before I kind of like, I mean, I knew I was gay but before I ... had told anyone. There was, like, a very outwardly lesbian girl at work and I was like "how do you manage this? Like how do you do it?" thinking like, "am I allowed to be a lesbian doing this? ... Does that mean I'm bi if I can do this [sex work]?" ... and she just said, "well, money". Like, "I don't really consider it, like it doesn't do anything for me". Like me, I've found like a lot of people I talk to about it are like, "yeh it just made me gayer, like, I thought I was bi and now I'm like a lesbian!" And I think that, like, sort of phenomena in a way is really interesting. Because like we all kind of knew what men were like anyway, we live in a society with men, but seeing them in that like very separate strip club or, like, brothel environment, I think really changes how you see them, you know? (Lola)

Here, Lola conceptualises what it means for her to describe her sexuality as not heterosexual, while performing heterosexuality within her work and her subsequent identification as someone not sexually attracted to men: "I was always drawn in because I knew I could fake it and that [has] sort of just become more apparent as I've gone along, really. Like, yeh, ... knowing that I can put on an act". Lola described her journey into stripping as one of financial necessity to support herself while studying at university. She thoroughly enjoyed stripping, particularly the camaraderie with

other queer women. After being in the industry for a number of months while having a long-distance relationship with a man, Lola came out as gay.

I was a very good straight ally, as far as I was aware, until maybe, like, three years ago. ... I [had] just recently split up with my partner, ... of three years and I had to tell him I was gay (laughs). And he knew I was stripping and, you know, he's very supportive of everything that I'm sort of going through at the moment. But, I definitely, I feel like stripping kind of made me, and I was obviously interacting with so many, like, men. ... It just made me realise that I definitely wasn't interested in them at all. ... Really attractive guys can come in who are really well off who, like, ask you out and stuff, and, ... like, I would feel sick (laughs). ... So, if anything, I think stripping made me much more gay. (Lola)

Her account of this transformation is collaborated by Harmony, who expressed that her sex work gave her sexual confidence which, in turn, allowed her to “approach women”, something that she had not previously had the confidence to do. Referring to the way that her personal understanding of sex has changed since participating in commercial sex, Harmony remarked:

It's like the way I did sex was just like it was something just done *to me*, and that's kind of the way that a lot of women view sex. ... And that's how we are kind of taught that sex is it's just something that's done to you. ... So, yeh, I hadn't had many sexual experiences that were good or intimate until I started sex work, and until I started sleeping with women. (Harmony)

Harmony points to the active role that sex-working women play in the sexual interaction with clients; somewhat the opposite of what is expected of women in non-commercial settings. As the service provider, the sex worker guides the booking interaction – a reversal of the required submission of women to men's sexual script. This management of the interaction, again, challenges a man's expected position as dominant, requiring compensation via overly feminine behaviour such as giggling, petting, and “doe-eyes” to restore the gender balance of the interaction, as discussed previously. In her words, “sex work totally changed the way I behave and who I am”. Here, with her use of the phrase, “who I am”, Harmony understands her identity as fluid, something that can be influenced by a profession and by life experience. She also stated that, upon entering the sex industry, she was unsure of her sexual identity, but sex working meant that it “didn't take long to figure that out”. Many participants agreed that their work in the sex industry had impacted the way they felt about men in general, and they would struggle to engage with a man for non-commercial reasons. Here, Harmony implies that attraction to women or, more accurately, lack of attraction to men is an outcome of working in the sex industry, a sentiment echoing Lola's words above, and shared by many participants. Harmony said, “I find I've got far less time for their bullshit. I've seen the good, bad, and the ugly of them. And I know what they're like and I don't want them near me!”

Likewise, Lola described the way stripping had changed her understanding of her own sexuality. Being presented with a large volume of men and feeling no attraction to them confirmed her suspicion that she was not sexually attracted to men at all.

You see some pretty gross sides of men. ... Obviously, I was really happy when a young attractive guy came in. I was like, "this will be easy, I'm not repulsed by him, at least I can have a chat with him," but when someone didn't fit like a very specific criteria ... yeh, it just made me [wonder]. I'd go home and ... if I wasn't attracted to that ... young, rich, really kind, attractive guy who just asked me on a date, if I didn't want to do that, ... then what's wrong with me? (Laughs) ... For a while, I felt like with my relationship with my partner ... was just stale or he wasn't my type, but then I was suddenly exposed to every type, hundreds and hundreds, ... and I realised zero of them were my type (laughs), you know what I mean? After just over a year of stripping, I was like, "well surely I would have met someone that I really thought was hot by now" so... (Lola)

Cassie quipped that when she approaches men in the work environment, she thinks "you are a wallet", while Ava describes a clear boundary between the sex she has for pleasure (with non-men), and the sex she has for work (with men): "I'm like, no get it away from me, or I put a dollar sign on it. ... I've ruined myself, like, in terms of sex with men". Ava ponders whether she could have continued enjoying sex with men for pleasure had she not entered the industry, and confirms that her sex work "cemented" her aversion to romantic relationships with men:

I would wonder if other people [with my experience] would identify as queer or maybe more bisexual, even though my relationships are wholly with women. ... I think being in the industry has cemented the fact that I will only ever be in a relationship with a woman, whereas maybe there would have been a tipping point before for the right person, as long as it could be open and I could still have experiences with women. Who knows... I, yeh, find that interesting that the industry has kind of ... left a permanent – stain is not the right word cos its negative, but for lack of a better one – stain on being able to separate sexual experiences with a man, from the ability to make money from it. ... If I happen to go out and have a recreational experience with a man and it wasn't great, or it didn't go the way I wanted it to, I think I'd be a bit miffed cos I would be like, "I could have been paid for that!" ... which is a terrible thing to say! ... I'd, like, happily have an average experience with a woman and be like, "oh well that was nice," or, "that was what it was," ... but with a man I'm like, "no time! No time!" (Ava)

Here, both Ava and Lola sought normalisation of their own experience through the research process, asking whether their experiences were common and posing statements as concepts that they wonder about. This shows a grappling with their identity experiences because of the perceived dissonance of their identities.

When discussing the impact of sex work on a non-heterosexual identity, questions arise about the overrepresentation of queer women in the industry. It is impossible to definitively determine whether sex work opens women up to non-heteronormative possibilities, or that women who are more likely to be open to alternative sexualities are attracted to the "deviance" of the industry in the first place; a "chicken or egg" scenario. Many participants, however, referred to the impact of

seeing “the worst” of men, as a gender, on their understanding of their sexuality. At the same time, being exposed to handsome, wealthy men in a sexualised environment, and still not feeling attraction was an experience of realisation for participants about their latent queerness.

For Erin, who had worked before her gender transition as well as afterwards, the shared experience of femininity in the sex industry had a profound effect on her sense of belonging:

Queer women understand. ... Outside of sex work, I found that I didn't really find myself and I didn't really find a stable or happy way of being until I intentionally, I think this was what I was trying to express a moment ago but I got side tracked, ... I didn't find myself able to come to terms with myself and who I was until I was surrounded by queer female peers ... and, again, it's because of that, like, understanding of otherness. Like, lesbians understand my experience as a trans woman better than straight women do, ... whether or not they're trans, cis or nonbinary themselves, ... they get what it's like to be compelled to perform ... in a way that, like, is completely uncomfortable or destroys you (laughs). (Erin)

Here, Erin's use of the word “peer” denotes fellow sex workers, and we can understand that Erin's relationship with other women sex workers allows her to share the understandings of performativity. The bodily practices of heterosexual performativity and the way this plays out on the embodied experience will be examined further in Chapter Six.

Ava agreed that sex work had an enormous impact on her sexuality, but “not in a largely positive way”, by bringing a focus on sex, her own desirability, and sexuality to the forefront of her mind – something she questioned as to whether it was an experience unique to herself:

I haven't spoken to anyone about it but ... I sometimes worry that ... I'm a sex addict or that I place way too much value on the sexual part of our relationship. And, you know, you're in a long term relationship, we've got a house, two dogs, like it's playing the life game, and I still want our relationship to be how it was in the first two weeks ... It will be the thing that takes us to therapy but coming from me, because I place so much value on sex. And I think that's me placing so much of my worth on my ability to have sex and to be good at sex, and to be sexually attractive. (Ava)

Ava reported that she found validation in the evidence of her sex appeal at work, and now that she has left the industry and does not receive the same confirmation of her sexual attractiveness, this can destabilise her relationships. Sasha agreed that sex work had positive effects on her overall confidence, even though she was not attracted to the men that she worked with: “I guess I enjoyed being able to be seen as a sexual object, you know, being objectified”. This fits with findings that, despite the ongoing stigma, sex workers' self-worth is positively influenced by their work (Benoit, Smith, et al., 2018).

Ava discussed her continued strategy of framing sex work as a job, rather than a pleasurable experience, to separate it from her sexual identity and “who she is”, but noted that this was troubled when she encountered a client who gave her sexual pleasure:

There was one point where I struggled, and I think it's because I didn't enjoy the sex that I was having. I didn't hate it, like it was just ... a job, ... just the same as any other job and I just didn't get anything out of it. And if I was, like, really, like, looking forward to it, or really turned on or cumming, I think I would be like “wow, what does this mean?” but I just was like, A leads to B leads to C, there we go, listen to your problems blah blah blah. Like, ugh god, men are pathetic. Like, I almost pushed that narrative harder cos I was like, “oh god, here you are. ... Come on, middle aged man, ... get in the shower, good scrub!” ... I think that helped me be, like, this is just a job. This isn't anything to do with me. ... And then there was a man, a regular who I didn't have any kind of emotional connection to, but ... I came during sex with him and it was during penetrative sex which, for me, has never even happened when I've had consensual, like just recreational sex. ... I was more intrigued than anything by that and I wasn't super comfortable with it. Now I don't really care ... it's two bodies having fun. ... But, at the time, I was confused by that. (Ava)

Lucia reported a similar troubling of her previously solid understanding of her own sexuality as a lesbian due to experiences with clients:

My experience when I did dances with men, sometimes I feel connections with customers, ... and I always think that “I'm a lesbian” and, yeh, ... in my whole experience, [there was] maybe five times that I've felt connections with the customers and I really wanted to go out with them. And then I say, like, “no, I can't because I have a partner”. But it's just weird the connection that you have in the dance because it's very intimate, you know, it's very close. ... Last year with one [regular] customer, for example, and so it's just weird, ... if I'm an actress, I don't supposed to have feelings. And then, yeh, I started have a little bit of feelings, but I always have ... my foot in the air, [and] say like “no, I'm just a stripper, this is a lie”. (Lucia)

I asked Lucia if she felt that she was “acting” less with this particular client who she had developed feelings for.

Yeh, because in the end I said ... to him it was a lie. ... I used to go VIP for two three hours [with him] and I didn't dance, just talk talk talk talk, and then at the end, ... I told him the truth. I said ... “I'm lesbian, I do this, this for money”. ... I had to be honest because I felt a little bit bad because I was, like, lying to him every time every time and now it's so drainful. It was so hard for me, cos that person didn't look [like] a bad guy, ... he didn't look [like] the other kind of people. So, yeh, it was shocking for him but it was because I developed a little bit of feelings. (Lucia)

Lucia admitted that she would have seriously considered dating this customer outside of work, despite the risks, if it weren't for her relationship with a woman.

I always think that if I go out [with them], are they ever gonna come back for me and book me for another hour? So I'm gonna lose a customer, or a regular customer, so I always say, like, I'm never gonna go out, I'm never gonna give my phone number. ... I created an Instagram, a fake Instagram ... with my stage name and that stuff, so I received messages from customers that they are gonna come and see me on the weekend. So, yeh, that kind of stuff but I wouldn't I mean go out with them for that reason. (Lucia)

Similar to Ava, GG's opinion of men was impacted by her work experiences with them: "I just don't want any men near me!" An incident of sexual assault towards her sister, perpetrated by a man, paired with her sex work experience had made her "stop feeling anything else" for men.

When I was younger, ... I wanted men's approval in a way. Like, I wanted to be hot and ... I wanted them to want to fuck me ... because I ... just didn't have self-confidence and that was like a measure of how good I was. ... And I still actually feel that in a way sometimes. Like, you know, when I'm walking down the street and there's, like, a group of builders and [I think], "oh do they think I'm like ugly or do they think I'm..." and it's just something I wish I didn't have in my head. ... I think the sex industry has helped in that in some ways but, ... you still get a lot of comments, and you still get a lot of negative shit about you know your looks.

I was out as bi in high school since I was, like, 16. ... My first, you know, dating and all of that was all with women. [After high school] I started ... dating men and I was never like super into it, but then, yeh I dunno. It's sort of only [recently], I was still identifying as queer and like "yeh I guess I might date men again at some point", until probably the start of last year, and then ... my little sister was actually sexually assaulted and, ... I dunno, I just stopped feeling any form of anything else and I was like, "yeh ... I'm gay. (laughs). (GG)

GG described her personal sexual life and sexuality as "stunted", questioning whether the impact was more significant due to her early entry into the industry:

I think it's stunted it, to be honest, really very much so. Like, I feel like it does impact on my personal [life], like ... a lot of my firsts have been in sex work which is not the same as many other people's experience, and even people within the sex work community. Like, a lot of my friends started in their late 20s ... and that is just a very different thing that actually I personally don't understand. I'm like you know this fucks you up! (laughs) So, yeh, I think it has had a negative impact there. (GG)

For Cassie, the emotional labour needed to successfully navigate the field of sex work as a stripper left her without energy to create other relationships. She described her high volume of clients, strong work ethic, and long shift hours making it difficult for her to put energy towards relationships outside of her work.

For a long time, I was really looking for some kind of partner and some kind of romantic relationship, ... but I think once I started dancing it was just harder because even just making friends I was like ... uh I'm so tired of meeting new people. ... I just don't wanna talk to another person. ... At least twenty lap dances a night and then in between all of those you're, like, talking to all those different people and it could even be more than that. ... When you're with a group, sometimes you have to entertain a whole group of people, ... you just can't switch off. ... Even when I would like meet my friends boyfriends or whatever, if they were a bit boring I just, like, had no patience for them. (Cassie)

Cassie also reported a lack of sexual energy, in particular, while she was working in the sex industry:

For me and my partner, like, it was such ... a massive drop in our sex drive ... and we often just didn't really feel like we wanted to have sex at all cos we were just so tired. ... Even though my

partner is female, just being touched in certain ways would just remind you of work ... so that was kind of ... a challenging thing for both of us as well. (Cassie)

E, who had started full-service sex work in her mid-teens, wondered if her work had impacted on her personal sexuality and her inability to reach orgasm:

When I'm having sex with people in my private life, I can't ... like reach orgasm or anything. ... I've been thinking about it a lot lately. ... I think, I dunno, like ... it's kind of tainted it maybe? ... I'm not really sure though. I

E had also, on two occasions, begun dating men that were previously sex work clients. She reported that, within these relationships, she felt that she was, "straight-acting, like not embracing my queerness or anything like that".

Most participants agreed that sex work affected the way they viewed or experienced their own sexuality in some way, however, impacts varied. Amy, for example, used her sex work as a "litmus test for [her] sexuality," and figured that, as she had so rarely felt attraction to men at work, this was evidence she was "point zero five per cent straight". When she had a recent sexual encounter with a man in her personal life, she found herself using her professional skills and wondering, "what [she] actually wanted from the experience". Others relished the sexual confidence born from their work. All in all, the overt identity work performed by participants enabled these women to critically examine what they desire for their intimate relationships. This led to a higher understanding of the "game" of intimate relationships, heteronormativity, and other societal expectations of women's sexuality. Here, they become conscious players, or habitus, of this field.

Returning to the "chicken or the egg" question, the Deprivation Model of Homosexuality (Fishman, 1951) suggests that situational homosexuality occurs when women do not have access to male suitors. This model is most commonly used in the prison context to explain women who "turn homosexual" due to sexual desire paired with the lack of access to men. Australian research shows that over 36% of incarcerated women identify as bisexual or lesbian, a huge overrepresentation from 4% of the general population (P. L. Simpson et al., 2019). Simpson et al. critique the deprivation model:

In a critical analysis of various interpretations of modern sexuality in and outside of prison, Kunzel (2008) asserts that if the idea of the homosexual and heterosexual are products of late-nineteenth century science and medicine, then the notion of situational homosexuality is a decidedly mid-twentieth century invention of social scientists that helped mitigate the anxieties associated with subversive aspects of prison cultures, such as lesbianism, unstable sexuality, all female kinship structures and masculine-identifying women. The concept of situational homosexuality achieved this by reinterpreting such subversive individuals as 'true' heterosexuals

who made attempts to mirror the gender norms and heteronormativity of mainstream American culture. (P. L. Simpson et al., 2019, p. 368).

I suggest that while the deprivation model raises interesting questions about the inherent fluid possibilities of women's sexuality, my data show that the impacts of sex work are much more complex than simply an over-supply of women suitors. Working in the sex industry has enabled participants to have a more reflexive relationship with their sexuality. Although many chose to only have relationships with women, they possessed an openness to diverse possibilities.

It's the whore taint – dirty workers

The literature on "dirty work" can be used to fill gaps left by Bourdieu's (1972/1977) Theory of Practice and to understand the phenomenon of whore stigma (Pheterson, 1993) or taint (Bowen & Bungay, 2016). High levels of whore capital, which enable successful navigation of the sex work field, do not translate to other fields and can actually have an inverse relationship with other fields. In other words, capital gained by successfully participating in the field of sex work can translate across as stigma and a lack of capital in other fields, such as other professions and social arenas. As Koken (2012) puts it, "stigmas are context specific, in that behaviors or characteristics may be considered normative in some environments and deviant in others" (p. 210).

As shown in Chapter Three, sex workers, like other "dirty workers", construct robust occupational identities. In contrast to other stigmatised workers, though, these identities are complicated by the sexual nature of the work, the impact of gender on sexual norms, and the way that sexuality and sexual practice is understood in contemporary society. The literature shows that sex work remains a highly stigmatised and predominantly illegal vocation in contemporary Australia. As such, the purpose of this section, rather than reiterating what is already known, is to briefly explore the impact of stigma, but to then discuss the way that stigma, or taint, becomes attached to the habitus.

Some participants managed possible stigma by normalising their sex work, downplaying its significance, or positioning it as an integrated part of their life. For example, V declared that she did not feel a need for strict boundary making rituals between her "real self" and her sex work:

I feel like if I was working [with] a bit more structure, like if I was in a club or a brothel, it would probably be a different experience. ... I just try not to think of it too much like that. ... It's more just like ok I've gone out, I've made some extra cash, I'm just gonna buy some food and go home and watch Netflix. (V)

Regardless of whether stigma is internalised by participants as a judgement about their worth or not, it can have far-reaching practical implications. For example, V, who remained employed in a government job and defined her sex work as more of a hobby for extra money, expressed fear that this job would be at risk should her sex work be discovered.

Yeh [I] try to make some money from it, like, what am I thinking? Like, I'm so stupid ... (laughs). ... I don't wanna put myself out there too much, like, cos ... I don't want to lose my job. Obviously, like that's a big thing for me. ... I work for the government, actually. So yeh, L.O.L. ... So, it's just ... not something I really need at all, like, coming out there. (V)

Here, V is talking about the way that the fear of exposure as a sex worker, and the career implications this has, impacts her ability to do certain types of work. Because she engages in topless waitressing, party bookings, and also participates in some online work, she treads a careful line between ensuring her work is profitable, but also maintaining as much anonymity as possible.

Yeh, it's definitely something I do feel I have to keep quite private with some people and, again, with a lot of my co-workers. ... One person [from my day job] found out, ... they saw some pictures of me and then ... they kept bringing it up around people, where I'm, like, ... "why are you doing this?" Like, why? What is the purpose of mentioning those photos in front of all these guys that we work with? ... Now that's all they're gonna be thinking about and that's all they're gonna be talking about to me, and I'm just, like, why would you do this to me? Like, I'm so mad. ... Stuff like that can really bug me cos ... the second somebody finds out something like that, it's a whole different thing and ... I don't want to blur those worlds. Like, that's the bigger thing to me. Like, my personal life bleeds into obviously both of them, but I don't want those two overlapping cos it's just like I'm a different person between those jobs. ... I don't wanna be talking about it while I'm here [doing my day job]. (V)

This aligns with Treloar et al.'s findings that:

lying to avoid disclosure of sex work was commonly reported by participants in most aspects of life. Re-framing or omitting details of one's life was an everyday practice for sex workers. This was often a necessary practice in order to avoid the inevitable clash when the supposedly polluting value of sex work came into contact with schools, parents, psychologists or family. (Treloar et al., 2021, p. 4)

V maintains a boundary between herself and full-service workers. Despite hinting at stages throughout the interview that she has participated in full-service work at times, she felt comfortable sharing with some of her day job colleagues that she performs as a topless waitress, as long as she was able to draw the line at physical sexual services. For this reason, V does not disclose to colleagues that she provides manual or oral sex. Similarly, Alexa remarked on the precarity of her other job being a factor in her openness about her sex work, stating that:

I'd like to think one day, probably not *to-day*, but hopefully one day [I wouldn't need to be so guarded]. I don't know if I'd wanna be exactly open with, like, everybody as well, because just that one negative experience really, like, got to me. And also because like I feel like it would be

probably detrimental [to] what I do for my work. ... Especially also because, like, I'm a casual worker so, like, they don't even need a reason to just get rid of me, obviously. (Alexa)

Alexa discussed the multiple implications of a sex worker identity on her life, including a rejection from a (male) intimate partner, and fear about losing her external job. The “whore stigma” (Pheterson, 1993), as discussed in Chapter Two, is often inescapable and not necessarily linked to active work status (similar to sexual identity, which is not always linked to sexual practice). Sex work identity and sex work taint are enduring, as are other forms of social shame based on sex that are attached to women. The taint that endures, even after a dirty worker has left their sullied industry, is described as “stickiness” by Bergman and Chalkley (2007). The effects of stigma can manifest long after a person has finished working in the sex industry; the whore taint remains a lifelong affliction (Bowen & Bungay, 2016). This enduring tainted identity, and its links to class, is illustrated here by Alexa:

I was on sugar daddy sites back when I was 18. Not that I did anything back then, but I was still, like, looking at that ... kind of thing and because I was poor. And I'm still poor, and I was, like, looking at it again at the start of last year because I was like, look, wouldn't it just be lovely if someone just gave me some money just for ... just gave me some money. ... I feel like it's probably part of my identity but, like, I've always had [sex work] somewhere ... around me in some way. Like, I lived next to a main road that had, like, a lot of prostitution happening on it, so I've always been around it and I've always seen it and had, like, opinions on it. I just feel like I'm participating now. And sort of actually earning something from it. (Alexa)

Here, Alexa points to the almost inevitability of her spoiled identity, and its links to the sex industry. Similarly for Erin, sex work is an enduring part of her identity as it is coupled with her queer transgender identity.

My best friend is also a sex worker and ... [there's] one point we massively differ on, where they are like, “no, no, only actively working girls can describe themselves as sex workers,” and I'm like, ... say if you were claiming any form of ongoing oppression without specifying that you are an ex worker, or that you're ... a mostly out worker or whatever, that's kind of shitty. But I suppose, like you said earlier, there's like there's an externality to sex work that, like, I think especially [with] the straight woman that I talk to, there's really this idea ... especially [amongst] straight, kind of less leftie, you know inner city people, like, there's this idea that like they'll get out of sex work eventually and settle down and then they will be like a wife and a ... a home maker and ... that's the end point. Whereas with most queer women that I know, it's like, well you're done with sex work for now, but it's always there, like, you can go back anytime, ... it's a handy fall-back strategy. ... Insofar as I'm a queer woman who has done sex work, there's an extent to which sex work will always be there. (Erin)

Many participants talked about toying with the idea or being interested in sex work and the industry for a long time before actually engaging in the work. Paton, for instance, connects her love for sexual attention with her star sign as a Scorpio.

I always wanted to be a stripper cos I've always been someone who's really liked attention and especially for being sexual. Like, I really like sexual energy, ... I feed off of it. Scorpio! (laughs) ... I've always been just really attracted to the industry ever since I was a little girl, even. I've always been attracted to sex work cos I just idolised being idolised. ... I really just wanted to be centre stage. I've been a dancer since I was three years old, so dancing's been my whole life and as I got older it started to, you know, become more about sex and it's like I want people to admire me and I want people to fancy me. And even if I'm not straight, ... it gave me more energy. I dunno, I felt really, really like [I had] a lot of power in that position. (Paton)

The women who had this fascination were more likely to see sex work as an enduring identity than those who vehemently rejected the enduring stigma and positioned sex work as “just a job”.

Although motivations for entering the sex industry almost always included an element of economic necessity (as does most work), many participants echoed Paton's desire to remain in the sex industry and talked about its fit with their existing sense of identity. Bella said, “I actually wanted to be a sex worker for a really long time, but I was in a monogamous relationship and that ended. So then I was like ok I'm gonna do it”.

Ava enjoyed the sexual power of having sex with men within her work and found reasons to continue working even when it was not financially necessary.

I was working full time [outside of the sex industry] as well and it ... was keeping a toe in. ... It wasn't even for money. ... It made me feel sexually confident in myself and liberated. And I guess it was ... like a power as well. [It's] so cliched to say, [but it's] just a way to, like, have a bit of power over the patriarchy. (Ava)

Elyse also spoke of an inevitability of sex work for herself. When asked whether her sex worker tattoo was evidence of her tie to sex worker as a personal identity, Elyse replied:

It's that, and the performance of femininity are the same thing to me, ... and I just always, I guess, identified as a performer first. ... I grew up doing a lot of that and then that becomes the same thing where you're like, “well, this is what they want you to perform”. ... I just always have been this way. I was encouraged by my family to be that way. Like there's ... a very funny story. ... I would do tennis. I always did a lot of sports as a kid where I'd be the only girl ... in a very feminine way. ... My mum would very proudly tell everyone about my cute little tennis skirts. I was like, four or five, and how when everyone else had to pick up balls. I got to hold the coach's hand and I didn't have to pick up balls because I was the pretty one. ... It's fucking repulsive. ... That's like encouraging children to flirt with adults. ... Hideous, but that was just what was normal, ... I guess, to everybody, yikes. ... That was always how I grew up. ... I understood from a young age that guys want something from you, ... and if you can, make it work, cause they're probably gonna do it anyway. (Elyse)

These experiences speak back to the harmful narrative of the agency-less victim who is coerced into the industry, a narrative that is common in anti-sex work literature (Barry, 1995). While, of course, some participants expressed that they had limited options for economic survival, multiple participants spoke about other reasons to choose sex work, and a political or personal alignment

with the industry. Ava, who had approximately five years of experience working in both brothel and private full-service roles, had been out of the sex industry for a significant time. She still considers herself a “peer”, though, and currently works for a not-for-profit sex worker peer organisation, as well as various other community service roles. Ava highlighted the importance of identifying as a peer, giving her insider status, and signalling her worth as a resource to other sex workers.

Especially if I knew I was talking with another sex worker, it would be important for me to identify as a peer. ... Yeh, gosh, I wish I had had more people that I could have lent on or just had a yarn with about some of the stuff that happens. ... I’ve got a beautiful friendship circle who are very accepting and a lot of them, [and it’s] not their fault, just wouldn’t get it. ... I often have conversations with other workers now about ... things like stealthing. ... I knew that the thing happened and that it felt terrible, but I didn’t even have a word for it then. And I wouldn’t have told anyone, or I didn’t realise it was, like, an assault. ... [I was] really green, but even now I’m like learning things about my historical experiences and that’s only through peer networking. (Ava)

Ava touches on sex work specific issues that are broadly unknown outside of sex work, and the value of her enduring identification as a peer. Lucia sighed when I asked if sex work (stripping, in particular) was a part of her identity:

It’s a part of myself because I think that[’s] “what I’m doing”. I think, “why am I doing this?” ... It’s always in my mind, like, why am I still doing this? I don’t, like, enjoy [it] at all. I should do something else. And then I go back to the same thing again. ... Yeh, sometimes it’s part of my identity cos it’s something that I’m doing for a long time. (Lucia)

V suggests that her sex work is only a small part of herself, but, at the same time, points to the enduring stigma that she feels will remain with her even when she leaves the industry:

I don’t look at it as a huge part of myself. ... Like, it’s always gonna kind of be there even if I don’t do it. Like, say I don’t wanna do it for six months, I might be like, ok I wanna start actually doing it again. It’ll always be in the background but it’s not a huge part of my identity. It’s just kind of like ... I do it every now and then! So, there it is, and I think that’s, like, the easiest kind of way to look at it for me cos ... it’s not the biggest part of myself. It’s just kind of, like, another thing that I do! I’ve got a lot of hobbies. I’ll consider this a hobby! (V)

We can see here that, for some participants – like Erin, whose woman-ness is already in question because of her transgender status and Alexa who identifies as “poor”, both of whom express their queerness through aesthetic choices – the role of woman is already somewhat unattainable. There is less at risk when adding the stigma of sex worker due to their already failed performance. For Lucia, whose identity is strongly tied to her Peruvian culture and her Catholic upbringing (and who is not out as a lesbian to her family), preserving her identity as a woman brought her more angst. As lesbians who have already subverted the hetero-norm, crossing the line into sex work poses less risk than it might for women who have succeeded at the role of woman in a heteronormative

society. After coming out as non-heterosexual, our parents may not hold on to cultural expectations of womanhood, the husband, and children. However, those participants who lived less openly as queer tended to also keep their sex work closeted.

The effect of stigma on the habitus of participants was that many chose to keep their sex work status secret from at least some people in their lives. The impact of sex work on intimate relationships will be discussed further in Chapter Seven. As noted by Payne:

To be a woman of value means to be a 'good girl' in compliance with Western and local culture's moral expectations based upon sex, gender and presumed future heterosexuality – expectations which are inherently raced and classed. Good girls express no sexual agency, deny desire, postpone sexual exploration or confine it to committed heterosexual relationships (within which they subjugate their own needs to those of male partners) and participate in judging themselves and other young women through the patriarchal lens of the virgin/whore binary. (E. Payne, 2015, p. 224).

The relevance of class

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Bourdieu's (1972/1977) Theory of Practice allows us to understand that capital appears in more forms than simply the economic, namely, the social and the cultural. In simple terms, social capital is the "who you know" and cultural capital the "what you know". These three forms of capital impact the ease with which agents can move across fields, with each form of capital having different weight across different fields. Despite a commonly held belief that Australia is a classless egalitarian society (Veracini, 2007), data from participants presented here show that class structures significantly impact the experience of these women. In a Madagascan study about sex workers' access to healthcare, Stobenau (2009) found that complex class structures shaped the field of sex work and, in turn, the symbolic capital held by participants dictated their access to healthcare. The lack of similar findings in this study may be attributed to the lack of diversity in the class levels of participants. Whilst it is difficult to definitively determine a person's class level, only one participant in this study identified that they had participated in street or survival sex work.

Erin was from a regional town and had a sex work experience that was differentiated from other participants because of her transgender gender identity. While some participants spoke about originating in regional areas, or participating in sex work out of financial necessity, Erin was the only participant to disclose homelessness as a factor in their journey into sex work. Many held markers of a middle-class existence, such as university education (Bourdieu, 1979/1984), or international migration to Australia. On first look, class seems to be invisibilised in the data, with

only three participants naming it explicitly when discussing their identities. Looking deeper into the data, however, reveals an underlying presence of class – or “socio economic status” as Chloe referred to it – in every interaction. When I asked Lola if she felt there was a classed aspect to queerphobia in the stripping industry, she replied:

The type of people that are attracted to sex work – I obviously don’t want to generalise – ... are pretty, like, open minded in general, ... at least from the privileged lens that I’ve looked through. ... If they’re not queer, they’re very ... open to queer people um.

I’ve never experienced [this], but, like, if I’m talking “vibe” wise, like when I’ve worked in ... an industrial area and it was a lot of, like, people from the country or, like, tourists and it was a bit, like, [a] dingy ... [kind of] clientele. Especially, like, they found it super-hot if girls were, like, making out, but ... if they knew that you were actually queer, ... I know that they would just not [approve]. ... I’ve had customers, like, talk to me about it actually and you’re chatting to them in a dance or whatever and they’ll say something really homophobic and I’m like, “eugh if only you knew!” ... But I’ve definitely had that happen less in, like, kind of higher-class places. (Lola)

Lola’s use of the word “vibe” highlights the difficulty of pin-pointing the often invisible elements of queerphobia. Here, she shows an insight into the different “rules of the game” between higher class strip clubs as one field, and lower class as another. Using a Bourdiesian lens, we can understand Lola’s phrasing of the “vibe” of different strip clubs as the unspoken “rules of the game” that make up Bourdieu’s fields. The class level – perceived, aspirational, or true – of a particular strip club, dictates the unspoken, yet indisputable acceptance and desirability of queerness and, thus, the forms of capital effective in each of the club fields. For example, Lola explains that a “dingy” club set in an industrial area that attracts the patronage of people “from the country”, is not an acceptable place to display queerness because the rules of heterosexuality are more firmly policed in this setting. By contrast, in “higher class places” less overt homophobia is displayed, reflecting McDermott’s discussion of contemporary access to greater choice of sexual and gender expression, where “class resources and advantages are likely to be crucial to negotiating and claiming, within this new liberal framework, equal lives” (McDermott, 2011, p.64). As in Cassie’s later account of racism, Lola attributes clients’ open mindedness about variant sexuality to their education levels, which are inherently tied to class.

Bourdieu theorizes social class as a social practice, not as a category or as a lifestyle, or even a set of dispositions but as an activity in which categorization, structures, dispositions and agency combine. He attempts to overcome the dualism between what individuals do as social actors and the determinative social structures operating on and through individuals, using the concepts of habitus, capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) and field. (McDermott, 2011, p. 67).

Some participants wore their lower to working class status as a kind of badge of honour, as evidenced by Elyse’s repeated reference to herself as working class and use of this term to explain

her discomfort in certain settings. I argue that Elyse's proud claiming of her class group relates to the "inverse whorearchy" that presents in contemporary leftist culture. As I discuss in Chapter Seven, the traditional whorearchy positions higher earning workers, workers who have less physical contact with clients, and workers who are less criminalised, towards the top of the hierarchy. I argue, however, that in contemporary leftist communities, there is an inversion of this hierarchy which may be understood by using Bourdieu's (1972/1977) Theory of Practice as traditionally oppressed workers having more cultural capital; a "street cred" of sorts. The traditionally marginalised identities such as street working, People of Colour, and transgender workers now rise to the top of the inversed whorearchy, where their perspectives and identities are the most revered by their sex working, queer, and leftist peers. Evidence of this inversion appears in both Elyse and Erin's accounts of themselves, which makes sense given their positions in leftist, progressive, Melbourne queer communities. For participants like Elyse, as described above, the sexuality labels she feels available to her are inherently linked to class – being "too poor" to indulge in the label of "queer", a term she links with freedom of sexual expression not available to her in her working class, regional early life.

In a discussion about visible queerness and coming out as not-heterosexual in the sex work workplace, Elyse spoke about the expectations of personal grooming and appearance across differently classed brothel spaces. After speaking of my own experience of the brothel as a very binary gendered space, Elyse added:

I think that also has a lot to do with, like, the quote-unquote "class" of the place you're working [in]. ... Obviously, [at] the higher end, the higher the standard is for all the workers. ... [This] is like a really gross thing to say, but ... I've never liked to remove my pubic hair ... and I know if I wanted to work super high end, that would be like deeply controversial. ... I remove everything else and I know that [in] other places, ... management couldn't care less. ... "Just wear your shoes when you do an intro" ... I think that always has a lot to do with, like, how much queerness you can get away with in the work space. (Elyse)

Elyse's conscious understanding of the class systems at play in her workplaces is further evident in her explanation that:

I think that's, like, a reflection of that class system. So if we're gonna talk Melbourne, and there's a couple of ... Boardroom and Gotham would be the two places that are known as being fancy ... and they would be the ones that are, like, the most stringent. ... Let's use body hair as the main metric here or, like, hair length on your head. ... [In] other places, ... management won't tell you that's not okay, you just might have trouble getting shifts or they won't really help you get bookings, ... or they'll be a bit cold. Whereas at those [higher end] places, they'll either bring it up in the interview or in your first shift or say, ... "We sell razors, you can get on or get off". (Elyse)

When I showed my surprise at the idea of a brothel selling razors, Elyse explained her view of this as a clear class signifier.

Especially if they think they're super high end, they'll have, like, little toiletry kits for the guys if they want to use them. ... So like, a little comb. ... [A] place I worked would provide a little comb for the guys (laughs). I always thought it was so cute (laughing). I was like, god, these men don't cut their toenails, do you really think they're going to comb their hair? (laughs) I think a thing in parlours where ... it's all hocking your hole, like, it doesn't matter where you're going, ... In my experience. But, at the same time, I think some of the lowest end places I've worked would have the bitchiest girls. ... Much more vocally so. I guess maybe because management wasn't enforcing it, there was that real, like, we need to uphold this. ... Like we need to uphold these standards for ourselves and I understand that can come from, like, internalised shame and yada-yada. ... If I'm gonna be a hooker I have to keep the standard, ... be a certain type of hooker. ... And that's, I guess, something I really struggled with and maybe one of the reasons I didn't come out, was because there was so much classism. There was so much, you know, whorephobia about women who worked uncovered or who worked in the streets. (Elyse)

The way Elyse uses the phrase “keep the standard” here portrays the lateral violence, internalised whorephobia, and the whorearchy that is present within sex work communities, as well as the identifiable ways in which class boundaries are (re)enforced by peers. Skeggs writes:

In a previous ethnography I showed how white working-class women did not and could not inhabit the category of femininity (Skeggs, 1997). It was a sign under which they did not belong because it had been developed historically in opposition to Black and working-class women, carrying with it qualities of docility and fragility, dispositions not associated with the working-class who were defined as robust, masculine, dangerous and contagious. The working-class women of the research performed femininity because they had to and did not have any alternatives that could hold value within their local space, making their performances as painless as possible, often with good collective fun. These women were aware of the perspective of the dominant which was always filtered through class judgements, constantly alert to the way they were judged as sexually excessive, pathologized as fecund and read as bad mothers; they were also critically reflexive about their practice. Their experience was not an unconscious pre-reflexive gendered experience based on misrecognition, but a specifically classed-gendered experience, one of which they were highly critical and highly attuned; they strongly refused the perspectives of the powerful. (Skeggs, 2004b, p. 24).

Elyse's casual naming of two of Melbourne's best known “high class” brothels, suggests that class lines sit undisputed in the sex industry in more overt ways than in other industries. Gotham City labels itself as Australia's “only eight star establishment” and its website shows high quality airbrushed pictures of “stunning ladies” (<https://www.gotham-city.com.au/>). Boardroom, by comparison has a catalogue of photos of “today's ladies” to browse through and highlights that it is “Australia's most awarded brothel” (<https://www.boardroom.com.au/>). Similarly, whilst never working in them myself, I can rank Adelaide's handful of clubs in order of class level without a second thought. This is consistent with casual peer conversations everywhere in the sex industry. Class within the sex industry, however, is not always consistent with what is portrayed by the establishment, its workers, and regular clientele (Frank, 2003, p. 204).

Participants also talked about their clients' expectations of class markers. For example, Elyse said, "when I was younger I used to be, like, I'm a nice girl from the country and I'm here studying teaching". In her view, sex work clients like to imagine that a service provider has a level of cultural capital; sex workers become masters of understanding *which* amount is enough, but not too much, to ensure that the interaction appears class-appropriate. And of course, Erin's experience of being seen as a possible "transgender trophy wife" is explicitly tied to class. Creating a potential "wife" out of a transgender sex worker can make the exchange feel morally sound rather than sordid. The morals around matrimony and "wives" are distinctly classed, as is – in Erin's case – the client's assertion that he has the power to make this fairy tale a reality: in this scenario he becomes the Prince Charming to a desperately waiting Cinderella.

Bernstein (2007) uses Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1979/1984) to argue that the middle-class sex workers she interviews are a part of the "new petite bourgeois":

Middle-class sex workers' frequent embrace of an ethic of sexual experimentation and freedom must thus be seen not only in ideological terms, but as a particular strategy of class differentiation as well... The embrace of these ideals serves as a means for members of the new petite bourgeoisie to distinguish themselves from the old petite bourgeoisie, an invisible boundary separating classes of individuals who might seem, at first glance, to exist in close proximity. (Bernstein, 2007, p. 477)

While Bernstein (2007) asserts that her middle-class sex workers professionalised their sex work careers by claiming particular skills, for example, my own participants had a sound understanding and ownership of their choice to participate in sex work for its economic benefits. Despite the majority of participants appearing to belong to the middle class, they did not seem to legitimise their position in sex work as middle-class women in this way. This may be attributed to my position as a peer sex worker and sex work positive researcher with an understanding of the realities of the sex industry, meaning that participants did not feel the need to justify or defend their work regardless of their class position or my perceived class status.

Bernstein also argued that increases in middle-class sex work reflects the shifting emphasis on sex work as emotional, rather than purely physical, encounters. Comparing "street-walkers" with the modern escort out-call, Bernstein (2007) asserts that there is a larger investment of time, and an expectation of fewer emotional boundaries between worker and client. Although now a decade and a half old, Bernstein's assertions remain salient, at least in part, in the way she cites Hochschild that "middle-class jobs typically call for 'an appreciation of display rules, feeling rules',

while working-class jobs ‘more often call for the individual’s external behaviour and the products of it’ ” (Hochschild, 2003, as cited in Bernstein, 2007, p. 484).

Sex work is more complex than Bernstein’s (2007) account though; I argue that class lines do not so neatly align with the physicality and relative speedy encounter on one end of the scale, and intimacy and authenticity on the other. The impact of the COVID pandemic beginning in 2019, accelerated an enormous move to online sex work which can also be linked to the impact of the SESTA/FOSTA laws discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Forbes magazine reported that, in 2020, the user-generated content site *OnlyFans* reported revenues of \$400 million, a 540% increase from the previous year, with the number of content creators growing to 1.6 million (Brewster & Dawkins, 2021). As Rodriguez found in her work exploring the impact of *OnlyFans* on stigma, the perceived “authenticity” of its content creators is fundamental to its appeal (Rodriguez, 2022, p. 41). While some authors argue that the shift to online work brings with it a “democratization of the adult film industry” (P. Ryan, 2019, p. 120), I am wary of claims that this levelling of the playing field can be translated to other forms of sex work that require actual physical services.

I maintain that lesbian and queer sex workers are masters of identity work, which includes an ability to successfully perform across class levels dependant on the desires of each individual client, workplace, and service on offer. In positioning herself as upper middle-class, Chloe made an effort to explain that the massage parlour she works in is reputable in terms of class which was evident from her first visit.

It’s in an affluent kind of suburb, but it’s this little cottage house. ... You would not know at all from the road, there’s no signage, it’s very discreet. [I] went up to the door, rang the doorbell, I was greeted by this receptionist who was very welcoming and, at that point, I felt like I’d entered a different world. (Chloe)

Later, Chloe mentioned that the other women working at the parlour were “normal girls”: “girls like me. ... I mean, what is normal? But just everyday girls. ... They’re not any kind of, yeh, stereotype of what you’d think or whatever”. And she used the word “discreet” when talking about the unspoken nature of the price of “extras” (further sexual services not included in the standard erotic massage price). When asked about experiences of homophobia or racism in her workplace, Chloe referred, first, to the class of her clients, and then her fellow workers.

Most of my regulars are businessmen, yeh professionals, married men [with] quite high paying jobs. ... I’ve never ran into really any trouble in terms of clients being out of control or just totally like, I dunno, ferals or disrespectful.

I'd say that where I work, it's probably half and half. Like, there are girls there that are likely from a [low] socioeconomic status and then there are girls there that are quite educated, quite cultured; exposed to and on board with different ... social issues and topics. ... There's bit of racism there [that] just gets swung around a bit, but generally it's not too bad. (Chloe)

Here, Chloe positions “ferals” in opposition to the “professionals” that she provides services to, and aligns their class status with particular behaviour and social norms around acceptance of difference. In other words, Chloe understands that the higher-class status of those she is surrounded by means that the social problems of homophobia and racism are less present (or at least less visible). Chloe’s use of the term “socioeconomic status”, rather than class, brings to mind the concept of Australia as a classless egalitarian nation. As argued by France and Roberts (2017), the term “socio economic status” has been used, both in Australia and New Zealand, to shift attention away from inherited systems that restrict mobility in order to claim themselves as “progressive meritocracies” (p. 13) .

Strikingly, Huppatz (2012) found that working class strippers had a greater class awareness than other working class occupations, suggesting that, because of their deviance from the expected norm, the habitus of working class strippers develop a necessary consciousness.

Most of the exotic dancers are also alike in that they are aiming for mobility and were reflexive about this. Their work- life stories therefore differ greatly from the many nurses and social workers who found it difficult to reflect on their class backgrounds. However, in this way they are also similar to the working- class nurses and social workers and, perhaps this is because the under- privileged have more reason to reflect on class relations. (Huppatz, 2012, pp. 117-118)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the first of the participant data to argue that lesbian and queer sex workers engage in a higher level of conscious identity work, becoming aware of their position in the fields that they inhabit. Using Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) Theory of Practice, I have argued that this is largely due to their deviation from the expected roles of women. In conjunction with managing their identities as workers, as women, and as queers, lesbian sex workers make decisions about the level of performance necessary to enable them to succeed in their work. Participants are consciously aware of the scripts provided to them as women performing female heterosexuality.

The picture that emerges from the data analysed in this chapter is one of participants who are very conscious of the habitus in which they exist, and of the rules to the various games that they play (fields). Examining participant narratives shows players who develop conscious skills to adapt

their habitus to the requirements of each field. I have established a link between the concept of dirty work and whore taint, and shown its existence in contemporary Australian society broadly. What is striking is the concerted effort of agents to “win” their respective games, the toll this takes on their sense of self, and, in turn, the practices that they employ to protect this sense of self. Some authors have, however, called for caution in overstating the scope of the habitus, and thereby creating an overemphasis “on the processes of reflexivity in identity construction” (McDermott, 2011, p. 68). Chapter Six thus shifts the focus outwards to the performative nature of the work and, in particular, the body, following the structure illustrated in Figure 1 of the introductory chapter to explore the corporeal boundaries of reflexive identity work. Subsequently, Chapter Seven explores the outermost layer of the diagram in the impact of community on participants’ identity construction.

CHAPTER SIX: THE BODY

Introduction

In this chapter, I consider my finding that there is a specific form of capital that exists *within* the field of commercial sex: Intra Industry Whore Capital, or IIWC. The capital one has in certain fields (in this instance, sex work and the queer community) is partly defined by aspects of the body, such as fatness and racial markers. This can be understood in basic terms as “pretty privilege”, known in the literature as “lookism” (Tietje & Cresap, 2005). In other words, this is the privileging of people whose bodies conform to that of (Western) beauty ideals, which may be translated to “erotic capital” (Hakim, 2010) – the way that an individual can use their “sex appeal” to their advantage. At the other end of the scale, discrimination based on facial difference is well documented (Konradi, 2017). I argue that to better understand the way that lesbian and queer sex workers navigate the field of sex work, this new form of capital needs to be theorised. As discussed in Chapter Five, IIWC denotes a practical mastery of the trading of sex, rather than this skill set being innate. Thus, I argue here that IIWC is more useful for understanding women’s experiences of sex work than concepts such as gender capital (Huppatz, 2012).

The embodied identity

“Lesbian sex worker” is an embodied identity. This is because sex work almost always uses the body as a pivotal tool of the trade, and does so in ways that are more obvious and more integral than other occupations. Whilst all workers use their body to communicate their identity in their work in one way or another, such as through dress, gesturing, and using spoken language, the body of a sex worker is harder to detach from the worker’s experience. In fact, debates around the worthiness of sex workers as human beings often reduce sex workers to *a body*. For over three hundred years, the sex worker body was “marked by the state” in that sex workers were forced to announce their profession by way of clothing (Nestle, 1987). Nestle draws similarities between this and the way that lesbian fashion was policed in the twentieth century with the need to wear pieces of women’s clothing to avoid arrest by the vice squad: “We dressed to answer two needs: to avoid the state’s penalties for being women of difference and to announce our own cultural participation” (Nestle, 1987, p. 235). Similarly, “lesbian” carries a definition that rests broadly on what one does sexually with the body, and with other bodies, at least in the common imagination (although self-definition is much more complex, as shown in Chapter Five). The embodiment of these two positions is at the heart of their contradiction; how can a lesbian (commonly defined as

a woman who has sex with other women) be a sex worker (a woman who has sex with men for money)? It is no surprise, then, that the body, embodiment, and the embodied experience were central themes in participant narratives. Whilst the paper dolls are not being examined as data themselves, the visual and interactive element that they added to interviews provided a vehicle for rich discussion about the body, which is the focus of this chapter.

For Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), embodiment is inseparable from social practice; the social world does not exist without an embodied experience. Thus, Bourdieu uses the term “social agent” rather than subject (1992, p. 137). Within the realm of sex work, the body becomes arguably the most important tool because of the fundamental link to the habitus.

‘The body’ does not represent what it performs, it does not memorise the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life. What is ‘learned by the body’ is not something one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is. (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 88)

The body is at the heart of Bourdieu’s sociology; it is recognized as a commodified, material bearer of symbolic value that develops in conjunction with social forces and, in this sense, is central to the maintenance of social inequality. Bourdieu recognizes the ways in which bodily orientations develop as the body becomes a lifelong project, integral to one’s sense of self. (Rooke, 2007, p. 232)

This is not to say that habitus is solely located within the corporeal, rather, it is the body coupled with a person’s experiences, social position, and inclinations. All of these elements are interconnected and affect each other. The habitus contains a person’s capital, and produces and reproduces their social positioning – it is a “structured structuring structure” (A. Green, 2008, p.599). The habitus is where disparity of experience is played out through the embodied experience of a social actor. The body becomes integral to the forming of the habitus, because the body is the way in which one experiences society and relationships with other human beings. Race, class, age, and other categories perceivable to others through the body are understood as inherent and inseparable from the habitus of others and ourselves, which assists in our task of discriminating and classifying each other as either same or different. Lawler (2004) explains the way that the embodied habitus plays out in liberal politics:

It is an important means through which ‘large scale’ social inequalities (such as class and gender) are made real, and are also made to inhere within the person, so that it is the persons themselves who can be judged and found wanting, and persons themselves who can be made to bear the ‘hidden injuries’ of inequality. (Lawler, 2004, p. 113)

This chapter explores the body as a site of these social inequalities, but also a site of resistance, discipline, and self-expression. Despite the use of the visual research method (collaged paper

dolls), we see in this chapter that the body and embodied experience are not simply what is visible such as clothing, accessories, and hair – the gendered embodied experience also comprises deportment, gestures, speech patterns, and tone of voice.

Separation of physical markers

Participants' narratives, in conjunction with the images created by their paper dolls, illustrated the separation of physical items of bodily adornment between their home lives and their sex work lives. Aside from creating barriers between themselves and clients through emotional management and imagined back stories, the physical barriers were the most often discussed tactics of managing identities that exist across two seemingly contradictory fields of "heterosexual" sex work and the queer community. Participants reported that the separation of physical markers was a deliberate tactic used for three main reasons: firstly, safety (making it harder for them to be recognised in their daily lives, as a disguise for their real identity); secondly, not wanting to be reminded of work or clients in their personal lives (particularly while having sex outside of work); and, thirdly, assisting participants to maintain a separation of "selves".

Broadly speaking, wearing different outfits at work demonstrated an understanding of the expectations, likes, and dislikes of clients. This skill requires whore capital, or, as I argue, a specific kind of whore capital: IIWC. IIWC reflects an awareness of what it takes to "play the game" or to succeed in the field of sex work. Participants spoke about experimenting with bringing in and taking out particular aspects of their "real" identities, and the effect this had on their financial takings from sex work. Some participants reflected on their sex work persona as an outlet for parts of themselves, or a chance to play with drag and dress ups. Alexa, for example, reported using clothes that she had once bought for herself, but later realised didn't fit with her gendered sexual identity. These clothes now make up the bulk of her sex work wardrobe. Erin spoke of the fun of playing at being the "perfect woman", but, like others, only rarely shared this play outside of work in trusted contexts. Frankie exhibited some certainty about the divide in her identities, noting, "so they're definitely two different people. Absolutely, definitely, like one hundred percent. I mean, I wish I had the energy to dress like all made up and stuff".

Separating with physical markers came along with other methods of physical transition in and out of work, too. For example, Harmony said that she takes a salt rub and a shower, combined with masturbation, to transition back into her home life. The most common items that participants used to separate were clothing (particularly underwear and lingerie), wigs, perfume, and makeup

(including particular lipsticks). Almost every participant's set of dolls showed a polarised – or, at least, very different – image for their “sex work self” and their “queer community and/or dating self” (see Appendix H). In the interviews, however, participants tended to portray the separation as being more nuanced and subtle in that what participants expressed verbally about their identity work sometimes contradicted what they presented visually in their dolls. This can be understood as an expression of the identity work that participants engaged in throughout the interview process. If the visual method was being used as data to more explicitly extract meaning from, this would have created a dilemma. However, as a tool for enabling rich interviews, the discrepancy between verbal reports and visual representation shows that this method created a space of reflexive engagement for participants.

For one participant, Bella, having a separate wardrobe of lingerie for work seemed ridiculous, expensive, and “sounds like a lot of work”. For her, buying a separate wardrobe for work is a “waste of money” and, as she explains, “I don't wanna let work affect my life that much”. Bella also spoke about wearing lingerie to kink events in her personal life as well as to work, suggesting a total crossover of her work and personal selves. In this way, commonalities were present across the dominant fields in Bella's sexual life (sex work, the kink/BDSM communities, and polyamorous relationships with people of all genders), and, therefore, capital portrayed with physical markers was also consistent across these.

E, who didn't change many things about her appearance or wardrobe for work, felt that changing her voice to be higher and “giggly” was an integral part of changing her “personality” to be more “feminine” (as discussed by others in Chapter Five). E agreed that, while she did not have the resources or inclination to keep an entirely separate wardrobe for sex work, she wouldn't wear the “sexualised” underwear in her personal life.

Harmony exhibited a high level of separation between her two distinct identities. She separated clothes, shoes, and scents:

My clothes and stuff that I wear to work, I never wear outside, even though a lot of them, I could. ... And a few girls do, like, they'll wear a certain outfit to work on, like, a Friday night then they'll go out and they'll keep the same outfit on ... cos its very similar to club outfits that we wear. ... If they're just wearing, like, a nice dress or something, they'll just go out with that, but for me, I can't do it. I just think it's been at work, like (shudders) ... it's been *sexed* with (laughs).
(Harmony)

Harmony's account positions her work clothes as being tainted with whore stigma from the dirty work she engages in within the field of sex work. She talked about striving to keep the field of her personal sexuality, and her sexual partners, completely protected from this.

With lingerie and stuff like for sex with that person after a date or just in general if I'm meeting someone for sex, if they know I'm a sex worker, I feel uncomfortable knowing that they might be able to pick that that's what I wear to work. ... I don't want them to think that I'm wearing something that I've been fucked in a hundred times. ... I make that decision for them [so] that they don't feel comfortable seeing me like that. ... That prevents me from even buying, like, a new thing to wear with a partner ... cos I still don't want them to think, like, I'm just gonna end up getting fucked in this ... or I have worn this [before]. It's weird, like, I can't wear lingerie outside of work cos, yeh, if I'm open with them about what I do ... I just don't want them to connect those dots and feel uncomfortable. (Harmony)

Harmony's account shows that the separation she enacts is deliberate and considered, but sometimes inhibited by the practical constraints of finances.

There's a party, like, a queer party that's called "Leak Your Own Nudes" and it's like a queer undie party. ... I went a couple of weeks ago and I wore my work body suit which ... I did feel weird about. Like, I wanted to buy a different one, I just didn't have money ... but, then it was nice, and I went to work and I, like, wore it and thought about the, like, fun times I'd had in it. ... So, yeh, there are very rare exceptions. Usually if I want to wear something in my personal life, I will wear it there first then take it to work, and it's like once its crossed that barrier [it can only be used at work]. ... Some of my expensive sex toys and that have been then used at work, and then I'm like, "ok, well they're not coming back," which ... can be annoying. (Harmony)

Cassie altered her appearance at work significantly through use of a wig, glasses, and heavy makeup, reporting that she started doing this due to concerns about being recognised and "outed". Thus, the practice evolved into a conscious way of separating the two identities:

I had a blonde wig with long hair and I think that that really helped me to kind of separate even more. Like, it felt more that Cassie became like a separate person to my identity through that and I even would sometimes wear glasses, even though I have perfect vision, to go to work because I was just really, I guess, scared of someone recognising me and losing my job. But I guess that further sort of made my distinction. ... I wear such heavy makeup, like, when I went to work and I did wear a little bit of makeup to go to work [at my day job] and stuff like that, but when I see my friends or whatever, I just don't wear any makeup at all, which is such a huge change cos when I was at uni, ... I'd do my makeup for forty minutes to go to a lecture! And that was just out the window. I think, in a way, Cassie or my dance persona, helped me refine myself more. I know who I am more, [and] be less apologetic for who I am. ... That created a bit of a separation for me. (Cassie)

Cassie's account shows that the separation of physical markers can fulfill multiple purposes. Lucia similarly wears glasses at work. She finds that the physical barrier between her face and the work is useful for her in separating emotions:

To create the difference in my character, I always wear glasses. ... This is like a barrier. My glasses, in the industry, is like a barrier for me from the outside. ... I dunno how to say [this], but then I was realising I was just thinking, like, why [do] I always have to wear these glasses? Then I

[realised] this is kind of [a] cover [for] my real me, something like that. ... Do you think that I can draw glasses [on] the doll? (Lucia)

Amy describes the two different aesthetics that she creates for her life, and admits that while she enjoys them both, they are “for different settings”. Describing her dolls, she says:

She’s got like ripped jeans and t-shirt and Doc Martens, and my work me has long hair extensions and booty shorts and pleasers on. And, yeh, I find them both very aesthetically pleasing but for different, different settings. (Amy)

Chloe, when discussing whether there are things she does to reaffirm her queer identity, said that she felt her queer identity is “on hold” at the moment. However, she does separate her personal identity and her work:

I amp it up a lot at work, and then as soon as I leave there, similarly, I’ll scrub all the makeup off, like throw my hair back up in a bun, yeh, put on trackies [on]. ... Days when I’m not working, I feel like ... I don’t wanna get dressed up as much. ... I can’t work out if it’s partly I just can’t be bothered or ... partly because, yeh, being like hyper sexy and feminine and really done up in that way does remind me of being at work or something. ... It’s interesting. I’ve got, like, two perfumes that I wear that I’ll only wear now at work because it’s like that scent, ... it’s like the brothel perfume now, and I can’t then bring that into my normal world, it feels too much of a crossover. ... The lingerie and stuff like that, like I wouldn’t wear that ... in my personal sex life, you know, even if it was pretty or whatever, like, just cos it would feel weird. It would feel like this isn’t me. Yeh, there has to be quite a separation. (Chloe)

As discussed in Chapter Four, V was the only participant who did not create two different dolls to represent her sex work self and queer or home self. V, instead, explained that her sex work self is aligned with her home self, but that she does have another self – the one that appears in her government day job and for her conservative family.

It is something that I’m concerned about, like, at my day job more so than when I’m ... anywhere else. ... I do just look kind of like the alt girl. Like, nobody really pins me as, like, queer or anything like that, a lot of people don’t. ... I’ve always thought that I look, like, super gay (laughs). ... I go out, I wear heels, like I do dress quite feminine. I always wear ... a lot more makeup than what I’m wearing now, you know. If I’m doing a job or doing a show. Whereas, at work [for my day job], ... I just try to dress plain. Like, sometimes, I’ll ... go a bit more out there, ... but I don’t particularly like showing off my tattoos cos it’s always a conversation. Like, they don’t bother people but it’s always like a “oh you’ve got a lot of tattoos!” that kind of vibe. ... I just don’t want to talk about it. Like, yes, I have a lot of tattoos, ... it’s not the biggest part of me. (V)

V explains at length the work that she does to keep elements of her identity secret from her day job, for example, by keeping her tattoos hidden:

It always becomes like, ... “oh, you’ve got that type of vibe, you’re so alternative”. ... Even people I went to high school with, like, if I know I’m going to be catching up with people I used to hang out with, I’m like, nah I need to hide the tattoos. I need to ... cover up more stuff like that. ... Again, that probably ties more into like work and family and stuff like that. It’s like, “you people

knew me when I was like fourteen, you don't need to know everything about me right now! ... We don't need to go there!" (V)

In this narrative, V illustrates the way that people separate aspects of their lives outside of sex work, and contrasts this with her own sense that her sexuality permeates different spheres of her life, rather than being tied solely to sex work. For Frankie, the separation of home and work self is predominantly about comfort – dominatrix clothes are not comfortable – but also expresses her awareness of the specific expectations of her physical appearance when in her dominatrix role.

I guess I try to ensure my tattoos and stuff are showing, generally like a peplum skirt or like a tight ... pencil skirt kinda thing. ... [A] choker kind of, I have ... a bracelet that says (Dominatrix name) that I wear because that ... kind of pumps me up as well if I'm there and I just sort of look at it, and I'm like "yeh, that's who I am now". Like, "this is me, this is my character". ... And my hair is, sometimes ill straighten it, usually it's not normally up like this, it's like a curly kind of tuft but I'll straighten it. When it was a bit longer, I had a, like, clip-in pony tail so it was like this long black curly pony tail. ... I'd wear heavy makeup. ... I also dress quite – aside from today – quite dark usually in my day-to-day life. I ... enjoy dresses and skirts mostly. I think it's probably just the tightness of the clothes and the makeup. I'm not really big on makeup cos it takes me so long and its exhausting. I can't be bothered, to be honest (laughs) ... She's definitely not me, she's ... something else entirely. ... Obviously, she's a part of me, a part of my life, because that's a character that I play. ... But it's like I said, yeh, exhausting.

Frankie at home, ... so, minus the makeup really. I don't wear a lot of jewellery. I have a lot of [issues with] texture – is texture the right word? ... So I wear dresses a lot and things that don't touch my arms or my back or my chest, which often I will [wear] during work, ... and boots and things like that during work which are just really full on for me. I'm pretty much always in sneakers. ... So it's, I guess not quite goth, because I don't really do makeup or jewellery or anything like that but just, like, black singlet. Like relaxed goth (laughs). (Frankie)

When asked if she felt her home identity could be read as "lazy goth", she agreed with a laugh.

For Harmony, the embodied experience of sex work requires greater separation than simple identity markers such as clothes and makeup. She goes through a specific routine to "cleanse" her body after work:

I just go home, have a shower. I use salt in the shower and, like, rub my body with salt and rinse it off, and it's like [to] get rid of their energy. [I'll] masturbate and usually just try to listen to a podcast or something until I'm feeling calm. Like, smoke a joint and just have like an hour at least to just, like, relax and just be at home before I can ... do anything again. And when I don't do that, like, I find it like it's the impact is real! (Harmony)

Erin discusses the aspirations of a separate aesthetic, the barriers to keeping a distinct separation and the difference across clients. Her account illustrates the practical challenges to separation of identities:

I used to, in a lot of ways, try really hard to make my work identity ... aesthetically different to my out of work identity. Like, my work identity is like hyper femme and very cutesy and ... very girl

next door and kind of like *traditional* almost. ... My work identity is quite sweet and, you know, coquettish and cute. ... She has a different age to me, she has a different life story to me, and ... all of the particulars of what she is are quite consistent between clients. ... If any of them ask questions ... about Erin and what she's like, they'll more or less always get the same answer, and I think that's important. But, at the same time, ... I'm kind of a bit slutty and a bit exhibitionist, and especially when I'm having a good day at the brothel or just even an unremarkable one, just a not bad day, I do have like a real tendency to post about work on Instagram, and post pictures of myself. ... There are extents to which my, like, "work identity" and my, like, "identity identity" just cross over because ... I just can't be arsed to maintain a difference. ... Especially when you're working like thirty-six hour ... shifts. ... That was my fun gambit for, like, how to survive when I'd just completely lost my drive was ... just work one really long shift. And when you get to like thirty hours deep at the broth, ... there's no longer a meaningful distinction between myself inside and outside of work because there is no outside of work anymore.

When asked if regular clients have an alternative experience of Erin, closer to the "real thing", she gives an account of her relationship with a long-term client who has seen her for fetish services over multiple years:

With him, ... the façade totally doesn't matter because, like, I know what kind of service he wants, he knows what kind of service he's getting. It has nothing to do with my identity [and] it has everything to do with what I'm willing to do and what he expects. (Erin)

So, for this regular client, the success of the booking is not reliant on a sound performance of "woman", like some other bookings. The client has permeated the space between "real Erin" and "work Erin" due to the length of their professional relationship. Hence, the client is satisfied with *whoever* Erin is in that moment, as long as their physical expectations are met.

Ava's account is a reflection of her time working in the sex industry years ago. Now working in a peer sexual health position, she gives a critical account of the ways she modified her body to conform to the binary ideals necessary in sex work:

I'm not stoked to say [this], but I really think I conformed to a gender binary when it comes to sex work, and I would, yeh, even if I went back into sex work now. Like, sometimes I'll grow pit hair ... just in everyday life, but if I went into sex work, I'd be very, yeh, hairless. (Ava)

Ava wondered whether this was about creating a separation or masking her identity as a queer woman. Like Lola, M presents her disguise for work as a type of drag, something she also finds fun and enjoyable and links to her earlier work as a dance instructor and performer.

I feel ok! I feel like, "oh! I look beautiful!" ... Sometimes, I have fun with it and my partner really love[s] ... *Ru Paul Drag Race*. When I watch it, I feel like, wow, it's like me when I went to work. ... I don't know why, but I feel its ok ... [to] feel like not me, it's another ... person. And it make[s] me feel like "oh this is a part of work" and this is ... M working. She['s] dancing and she ha[s] her personality. ... I feel like when I finish I ... can take myself out of the work or, you know, I still have another life, ... So I feel this is great. (M)

Using the term “real life” to denote her previous work as a dancer outside of the sex industry, she illustrates that wearing “drag” made her feel more comfortable performing in a strip club than on a dance stage.

It's more comfortable than [when] ... I perform in my real life. It's more comfortable because in my personality I don't like to perform on the stage that much. I dunno, just maybe the kind of dancing that I do, [it doesn't] ... suit ... my personality. I like to be a teacher, but I don't like to perform. (M)

Despite the playfulness of dressing in drag in this way, M maintained boundaries around her home life. When asked whether she would wear her work makeup and wig for fun at home, she responded decisively:

No, I'm not gonna dress up like that at home. Except [if] my partner want[s] something, ... but, like, usually I'm gonna ... take my makeup ... off [and] everything before I left the club. ... I'm gonna wear, like, a cap or something. (M)

She continues to illustrate that the physical separation is not only for her emotional wellbeing, but is also a safety strategy – a total disguise, so that when she comes home, she looks like a different person. M compares the freedom she feels when in this disguise to what she imagines it feels like to use the internet to communicate anonymously:

My physical look, it's really totally different, so I feel more safe ... to go there and, like, oh no one can recognise me and, you know, I can do whatever I want. ... Maybe sometime[s] I feel like this is maybe ... like behind a keyboard. You can do whatever you want because you don't care [if] the people know you or not. So maybe this is the same thing when I put wigs on, put my really heavy, heavy makeup on, and ... [people] cannot know that I look like this [like her everyday self] working in there. Nobody can believe it, so I feel like it's safe. And it's completely like [I] can separate from when I'm home or when I go out and do my activity. (M)

When asked to describe the aesthetic difference between herself within and outside of the sex industry, M relayed an anecdote about a time she was mistaken for a man when dressed in her everyday attire. She goes on to describe the assumptions that are made about her due to her appearance when working in the sex industry as a contrast. She attributes some of these perceptions of her to her Asian appearance.

Like, the physical [me], its 100% different when I'm outside. I'm gonna be, like, boyish. ... I went to the women's toilet and the lady just open[s] the door, and ... they just, like, stop and then went back and have a look the sign, because they thought that I went in the wrong [door], and then they[re] just shock[ed]. Like, ... they[re] just like “oh shit,” and then I'm just like, “oh yeh shit!” (laughs). Yeh, shit yeh! ... It happens all the time, so just outside but when [I go] into the club, oh, I don't have that problem. [I] got the wig, ... beautiful lingerie, but ... the personality ... of M at work and M outside [is] actually quite similar, if you started to talk you know with me at work maybe half an hour or, like, take time to talk me, you will feel like oh actually I'm not that [character I play at work]. ... When the customer see[s] me as the Asian, you know, long hair, they always think that the Asian woman [is] like gonna please men all the time, and that is really

[in] conflict with my personality. Yeh, so sometime[s] it's quite difficult as well when I get this very short lap dance because I don't really have time to, like, explain or get to know each other. Sometime[s], they just "ok, you," come and grab and bring me there and then ... harass me. ... That is very difficult because they think that they can do whatever they want to ... the Asian woman, I dunno. ... But I feel like that's happened all the time and the people ... [are] still racist to me all the time as well. They just don't want it because I'm Asian, or they just like don't think I'm gonna understand English. "Oh wow you're English is very good!" ... You know, it's always like that. ... I feel like when they talk with someone like longer and longer, my real personality ... come[s] out so I feel like at the end of the day, I'm still M. ... [M] at work and M outside, the personality is still the same, but maybe [it's] the detail ... that is fake. Maybe it's different, but my personality is still the same. ... But when outside, I [am] wearing, like, ... easy boyish clothes. ... It definitely makes me ... stronger and stronger every day ... since I start[ed]. (M)

M's anecdote here shows the frustration she feels about being racially categorised. She feels misunderstood or not "known" within her stripping role. She does not have time to challenge a client's view of her – based on her appearance alone – in the short period of their interaction.

Lola jokes that her friends call her a "catfish" when she goes to work because:

I truly don't even look ... like myself. ... When I first started working, a guy ... at my high school – I wasn't out as a stripper at all – came in and I did a dance for him and he didn't know who I was! (laughs) ... Like, I completely transform, like, it may as well be drag makeup. ... Just looking at these two [paper dolls], it's really how I would see myself at work (laughs). Completely different face. (Lola)

When asked whether the difference shown between the two dolls was a purposeful or important transformation strategy to her, Lola stated:

Yeh I would say so, probably because ... in my usual life, ... I don't love how I look or anything, so I'm not gonna go to work feeling self-conscious cos I won't do well, regardless of how I look. ... I think it's more on how you present yourself and [the] attitude you give off, so when I have all that makeup on, and when I'm covered in fake tan, and, like, my hair's done and everything, ... I feel like I'm the most attractive self I can be. ... I guess it makes sense (laughs). (Lola)

Lola touches on a salient factor in many of the participant's narratives; the idea that creating an image for sex work is not only about attracting clients but also about how the self is perceived by the participant. This is discussed further in the next section.

The separation efforts that the majority of participants employed to keep their home identities and sex worker identities distinct from each other share similarities with the fragmented and confluent embodiment observed by Heineman (2016) in her work on the embodied practices of sex workers working in academia. Arguing that the embodiment practices were context specific, Heineman argues that, using Bourdieu's framework, we can understand these different arenas as fields.

I find that the discourses interviewees use to reflect on their embodiment practices fall into two categories: fragmented and confluent (Butler 1990: 78). Unlike Butler, though, who argues that the bodily practices are “internally discontinuous,” I find that these discursive performativities, as expressed through reflective embodiment practices, are largely conscious. That is, I find that sex workers in academia perform fragmented and confluent embodiment as a conscious response to external biopolitics—in Butler’s language, both fragmented and confluent embodiment practices, as discursively analyzed, are two forms of drag. That is to say, sex workers in academia are not controlled by the internalization—and subsequent performance of/reflection on—disembodying discursive practices, but undergo complicated apprenticeships in which embodied practices/reflections are resultant upon particular biopolitical constraints, even when those practices and discourses mimic Cartesian dualisms. (Heineman, 2016, p. 134)

In this study, the majority of participants agreed that there was a separation between the way they presented themselves aesthetically at work (the field of sex work) and in their personal sexual lives or the broader queer community. Like Heineman’s (2016) sex working academics, these practices were considered, conscious, and learned. This consciousness increases the level of whore capital possessed by the participants, reflecting the separate and consciously performative space in which they must “play woman”, and enabling them to convert their Intra Industry Whore Capital into economic capital. Both V and Bella, however, stood out as participants who did not report any separation strategies between their sex work selves and their home selves. It makes sense then that V and Bella reported enjoyment in their jobs – in Bella’s case, enjoying a polyamorous and kinky lifestyle, and, for V, with her real-life partner.

(Self) discipline and the performance of ‘woman’

It is well documented that women are expected to discipline their bodies to successfully perform their expected gender role (Black, 2004; Gimlin, 2007). The participant narratives in this section explore the ways in which lesbian sex workers enact this discipline to perform what they perceive as the perfect “woman” to meet client expectations. This phenomenon is referred to as “bodywork” by authors such as Schrock et al. (2005) who found that women across all industries are required to perform this work. I argue that, because of the specific role that sex workers play in enacting the *perfect woman*, they occupy a site of intensified bodywork that is scrutinised more thoroughly than in other industries. Further to this, lesbian sex workers have a more complex relationship with the subject of *perfect woman*, particularly as this relates to man.

If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint... one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary. What I call my “own” gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. (Butler, 2004, p. 1)

And, so, as lesbians who also engage in sex work, there is a certain dissension between the expectations of their two audiences. Reflecting on their practices, many participants discovered that, rather than being explicitly requested by sex buyers or sex work managers, the strategies they used made them feel more confident about their performance. This further enabled their self-confidence and esteem, which, in turn, ensured the “right” performance. They disciplined their own bodies to achieve what they perceived to be the correct result. Sometimes, these practices were inspired by what they perceived to be the judgements of other workers, a phenomenon that is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Much has been written about the “ideal” woman. Since Simone de Beauvoir declared in 1949 that “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (1949/1988), it has been understood that the gender role of woman is socially produced (Butler, 1990; Olasik, 2016). The brothel and strip club, then, in their mirroring of wider society, reproduces ideals of womanhood and becomes a stage for sex workers to perform their version of the ideal woman. These performances materialise across internal identity work, as discussed in Chapter Five, but are also expressed in choices of clothing and mannerisms, body modification, and deportment. As Bourdieu stated, “Social distinctions and practices are embedded in the most automatic gestures or the most insignificant techniques of the body – ways of walking or blowing one’s nose, ways of eating and talking” (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 46). The following narratives explore these performances, which include restraint, discipline, and play.

As discussed in the previous section, the bodywork (Schrock et al., 2005) performed by participants was linked to their sense of confidence, or even simply the mindset of being at work. A “correct” and confident performance of “woman” is, thus, as much about the worker as it is about the potential client. GG, a full-service parlour worker, felt her performance of a feminine woman was necessary to meet clients’ expectations and avoid a negative interaction:

[If] I’m not performing the femininity that they’ve paid for... it just feels like I’m gonna end up having [a] bad [experience], ... I’m the one who will have to wear [the consequences of] ... expectations I’m not meeting, ... so it’s just easier. (GG)

Reflecting on whether the pressure that she felt to remove body hair came from sex industry management, or clients, or herself, GG illustrated the way that self-image relates to ability to perform and self-worth:

Honestly, I think it’s just myself. ... I don’t often get clients say[ing] anything about it, ... but when clients will, like, touch my legs and that, and I haven’t shaved, I just feel exposed...

In GG's experience, meeting the client's expectations ensured that the booking went smoothly. In a world where sex workers are at risk of violence in every interaction, customer satisfaction becomes of utmost importance. Elyse also strove for perfect womanhood in the identity she presented at work, stating that she would never wear lingerie to work that leaves a line from cutting in, or have chipped toenail polish. She confirms that her clients would probably not notice these things, that "so much of the stuff we obsess over, they would never notice in a universe". However, for her, it was important for her own confidence that she is "presenting women correctly ... to make money and that's what guys want".

Harmony avoids dyeing her hair "a fun colour", holds off on getting tattoos, and applies high levels of makeup and grooming. She describes this as putting in effort to look "feminine", a performance she says is complicated by her weight as a bigger woman, discussed further in the next section. As she explains, she aims to look "pristine" and "feminine", with curled hair and makeup that she would not choose for her personal life, because her usual clients are "young and athletic" and would hate an "alternative" look of dyed hair and tattoos. Lucia similarly uses clothing and a hairstyle to portray what she feels are desirable personality traits: "sexy lingerie with two ponytails to look innocent".

Elyse, who identifies as high femme, admits that she would love to let her "very light" leg hair grow instead of shaving, and that sometimes she fantasises about having a "half-head shaved, like a cool indie-girl haircut", however, the threat of an effect on her income dissuades her from trying this out.

I think a lot of the things that are, like, my version of queerness ... which are, like, deeply mild ... to lots of people, to me isn't worth the risk. ... Like, you know, hair is, like, relatively irreversible, but, like, is it? Like, that's a long-ass time ... to grow, like, half your head [of hair] out. (Elyse)

Here, Elyse articulates the dissonance that exists where she feels pulled to appeal to two very different audiences. As discussed in the previous chapter, Elyse also sees her identity as a femme lesbian who dates butch or masculine partners as inextricably linked to her work as a sex worker and, in turn, sees this as linked to historical traditions of lesbian relationships. Therefore, her performance of "woman" is situated in a temporal space of femme/butch desire (Nestle, 1992) in which the historical boundaries of this dichotomy shape her behaviour and deportment. As touched on elsewhere in this thesis, femme/butch relationships emerged at a time when

lesbianism was classified as an illness (and internationally was criminalised). Femme identity became a way for lesbian couples to mask themselves as heterosexuals, with one partner adopting a masculine aesthetic and the other a more feminine appearance. As work for butches was insecure and always at risk due to lesbophobia, femmes found a place in the sex industry. This historical tradition has informed Elyse's and others' contemporary identities, though some may argue that this veiling of queer womanhood is no longer necessary to protect lesbians from violence or unemployment (Giacomuzzi & Tal, 2022).

GG reflected on the extent to which her personal preference for body hair grooming was influenced by her work, such that she felt she could not identify her own personal preference, even if she had this choice:

I'm not sure to be honest. It's something I think about more and more. ... People I date tend to not remove body hair and that, but I just have to and I've never really had a break ... in recent years for long enough to consider it. Like, I definitely like push the boundaries ... more than I used to. Like, I'll go a month without shaving my underarms and that, but I will always end up doing it because it's just easier. ... I just need to make money. (GG)

Ava had played with letting elements of her personal life cross over into her appearance at work in her previous brothel work. She observed that this did have consequences for her client relationships:

There was one time where I kind of played with including a bit of me in work, or just trying to be a little less girly, or just being a bit sick of the performance. And I used to have a lot more piercings than I do now, but I started wearing my nose ring and my nipple rings to work. ... Obviously, I can't do anything about the tattoos I've got and some clients hate them and think they're not feminine and it's, like, "whatever". But I ... noticed that I would get, yeh, quite adverse reactions to having nipple rings. ... Yeh! From ... my regulars at least, so I was like, this is not a thing that I will do. (Ava)

When asked why she felt there was a negative response to what could be seen as a sexualising of her body, Ava responded that:

maybe it's that some of the clients knew me as what I was already, and maybe that shattered whatever their expectation or the fantasy they've set up was, and maybe I was different. Maybe I was like, "oh don't touch me in that way," or, "you're ruining my jewellery". ... Yeh, I'm not sure. I just noticed that ... it didn't work as well for me. And maybe that's because I was giving off a certain personality or a certain persona and that real part of me ... clashed with ... the young cute bubbly ... girl next door that I was going for. It was too alternative (laughs). (Ava)

Ava's account illuminates the effect of mindset on appearance and demeanour in the performance of woman:

Interestingly, when I went in for a shift once ... – I was always pretty punctual but I was late – ... I walked in the door and I was wearing, like, baggy ripped jeans and, like, a pair of Vans and just a tank top and [looked] dishevelled. ... I walked past a client ... [after] everyone had just done an intro, and he was like, “I’ll book that person”. ... Yeh, it’s interesting cos ... gosh you go to the effort of the lingerie, the makeup, the hair, like, getting glam. And then it’s like, gosh, half the people that come in, half the clients, probably want to fuck the girl next door. Like, literally the girl next door. ... Maybe that fits more with their fantasy of, like, whoever they want and can’t have in the real world. ... Yeh, I think there’s like a real divide between clients who ... want to take out their sexual desires in a safe way but, like, based on someone that they actually do want versus wanting that whole sex worker taboo or porn star type experience. ... Maybe it’s also that, like, “I don’t care” vibe as well. Like, ... you want what you can’t have where it’s like, “Oh, you don’t want me? Oh, now I want you”. (Ava)

Other participants’ reflections on their experience of similar situations where they presented with a more casual appearance included mixed reports. Some said that this only worked with some clients, that it was too hard to maintain with regular clients, their clients didn’t notice the difference, or that they got better financial outcomes when they didn’t have time/energy to maintain the performance. Using a Foucauldian lens, we can understand that discipline is most effective when exercised over the self rather than from an external source (Foucault, 1984/1986). When asked whether she needed firm boundaries between her work self and home self, Amy instead spoke about creating an “ideal self”.

I think the hair is always a sticking point for me anyway. ... If I designed my ideal self, I’d be like Jessica Jones, you know, Krysten Ritter as, like, this sorta ass kicking [character]. She, like, doesn’t look like she made an effort but she’s got great hair! I’m always like, goddamnit it’s so much effort to get these extensions in and make it look like you didn’t try to have really good hair. ... Personally, I think I would just like to have solid hair, in a way that I don’t have any interest in wearing sexy underwear. (Amy)

Chloe who had been working in massage in Adelaide for a number of months agreed that she employed practices to make herself as feminine as possible for work.

I feel like I make myself look super feminine: always have my hair down, always have my makeup done well. ... I honestly did not care for lingerie really before I had this job in terms of, you know. Really fancy kind of stuff, but I definitely went out and bought, like, a whole heap of what I would think from the male gaze would be sexy. ... Me, personally, I think it’s all a bit tacky. (Chloe)

Lola, who was new to the stripping industry when the pandemic hit, explained that this forced her to take some time off and that she did not look forward to resuming the required body maintenance when she returned to the industry.

I really wanna chop all my hair off. Like, I would look like an egg but I really wanna do it! ... I think I would feel a lot more comfortable, but I just I couldn’t because [of] work. ... Even if I got an undercut or something, I don’t think it would suit me at work. I think a couple of the girls can pull it off. ... I work with, like, almost what I would consider a butch lesbian. Like, she has ... her hair completely shaved, and ... she doesn’t shave anywhere [else]. There’s hair going all about which is, like, super fine and she’s really popular and makes money. But I think you’ve gotta be very,

very confident in yourself, like especially in stripping, to be able to do stuff like that [and be] really headstrong, and I'm not there yet. ... I know when I go back to work I'm gonna do, like, the lashes and the big hoop earrings, and I'll fake tan, and I'll shave everything, and my god I'm not looking forward to it! (Lola)

Frankie talked about keeping her body hair within her dominatrix work, and not having it questioned by her male clients. Her account illustrates the way that the body policing of women is present in public settings, and reinforced by the beauty industry but not necessarily tied to sexual services. When asked if clients had ever seen a problem with her body hair, Frankie said:

No, they never have, which has been great – it's fantastic! But I feel like [it's] a only a matter of time because, I mean, the look on some people's faces when they see ... someone identifying as a woman with underarm hair or leg hair. I've seen people [looking]. I'll be waiting at a bus stop and I'll have my legs crossed, and ... someone will be sitting next to me and they'll just be looking around and all of a sudden [it draws their attention]. Like its just some hair like it grows there! Like I haven't done anything special it's just, it's just there normally... Even in shaving adds they shave bare legs like, that's how much we can't even deal with the thought of a woman...Having hair! Like I remember when that was first pointed out to me and I was like 'oh my god they shave bare legs!' (Frankie)

Alexa reflected on the way that her shaved head impacts the aesthetic choices available to her:

I was thinking about, like, getting a wig but ... I don't have one at the moment. And then considering I've got, like, tattoos that I can't really cover up as well, it's sort of just like, ... that'll be my aesthetic, some kind of, like, alternative person. ... I don't know if it's working. I see ... [other] people in real life who are more feminine, and then I have this idea that they would just do a lot better than I ever would just because they're just more feminine than me. Like, not even people on the cam sites; it's just people in real life. (Alexa)

Alexa went on to discuss the effort of wearing her work lingerie in her personal life which illuminates the labour involved in the performance of woman. Whilst Alexa chooses to sometimes engage in this within her personal life, she positions this choice in relation to her bisexuality, identifying that it is a performance aimed at the male gaze.

One of the pieces that I've worn was something I just got just ... for myself. ... And I've worn it for two people but then it just kind of feels silly to wear it at this point, cos at least when I'm online, there's like a good while of me wearing it. But then if I ever, like, see anybody they have to take it off ... immediately and it was a real effort to put on [so] then I don't put it back on again, it just stays off so it just seems like [a waste of time]. The last time I [wore] it, I like travelled an hour ... to just take it off. ... I could just have not worn it. We were gonna get to the [same] end result anyway. (Alexa)

Again, discussing whether there is a deliberate strategy to separate home and work, Alexa talked about the effort needed to dress for work. Her account shows the high level of self-discipline needed to maintain capital in the field of sex work, and the way that she feels free of this expectation outside of work where she, instead, prioritises comfort.

I just feel like it's not something that I would, like, naturally do. ... I've done it because people are like, "that would be nice," and, like, I want to make people happy ... but then it's like probably something that would be [more] like a special occasion thing. ... I could put on nice underwear. It just has to be like something that's comfortable cos I feel like I really prioritise ... comfortableness and practicality in my general life but then that doesn't really apply for, like, sex work. (Alexa)

Elyse talked about the way the labour of the sex industry has changed her relationship with her personal aesthetic. She talked about how she's now less inclined to put time into her makeup in her personal life because of the amount of time she spends on it for work:

I think actually the biggest difference would be makeup and how my relationship with that has changed since before and after. ... I've never been someone that would wear a full-face [of makeup] day-to-day, but I used to not mind. Like, "oh I'm just going to the gallery with friends, ... I've got an extra fifteen [minutes], I'll do this". ... Now ... I'd have to be like, "oh I'm ready half an hour early for no reason, I guess I'll do my eyebrows". ... That's probably my biggest difference ... because at work you're pretty much nude a lot of the time. ... The biggest difference for me would probably be, yeh, how much effort I'd put into my face. (Elyse)

When asked about her willingness to enact elements of the discipline needed to maintain her personal appearance for work within her personal sexual relationships, Elyse explained that her decision would be based on the effort, labour, and financial capital necessary for these elements.

I probably would agree to it if they'd bought it. ... Well, no, especially for a lot of people I've dated I'm like, you have no idea this shit costs ... and how much time it takes. ... For example, my boyfriend loves long nails. [He] would love for me to have a long manicure, and I'm like, no, that takes an hour and a half to put on and off, I'm not sitting in the nail salon for that long, it's deeply painful if you, like, bend a nail, and I'm not paying that much money every two weeks! ... Like, if you're ever at that income level where, sure, I've got an hour and half every ten, you know, twenty days to sit [and get my nails done], we'll have another conversation. ... But until then, you'll get a neat, polished manicure and you'll be grateful. (Elyse)

Cassie, who had exited the sex industry, gave a lengthy reflection on how her relationship with clothing had changed since she was working in the industry, identifying that she was "a lot more materialistic" when her job necessitated a particular aesthetic. She recalled a time where a former male partner had accused her of "using her Cassie charms on him" when she had worn her work outfits in a private intimate setting: "No, I'm just being myself and even if I am using those quote unquote skills, like, that's a part of me as well. You know what I mean? I'm not two separate people" (Cassie).

As her current partner had been a stripper too, Cassie felt that this insider status would allow her to feel differently borrowing her work clothing for personal use. Despite this, she preferred to indulge herself in luxury pyjama sets, rather than lingerie, as they were less about an external gaze

and more about her own comfort and enjoyment – something she positioned as opposite to the labour expected in the industry:

And no one else sees them, just my partner. ... It can really just be for me and I'm not trying to dress up for anyone and it can be just purely something that I enjoy. ... I don't think I've really worn any of my old work stuff. Like, it's just sort of sitting in a box. Maybe I've worn it, like, twice or something. ... It was a really good feeling of just, like, taking off my makeup and taking off my wig and just feeling like I could kind of be myself again in my pyjamas! (Cassie)

Themes of comfort, ease, and relaxation dominated the way that participants chose to dress outside of work. This points to the expectations of expense, discomfort, and even pain, placed on women to perform the appropriate level of “woman” for public consumption. The performance of “woman” is distinct and more difficult than the performance of “man”. Man is the default (de Beauvoir, 1949/1988) and to be a woman, demands that “women do more than their fair share of bodywork aimed at symbolising gender difference” (Schrock et al., 2005, p. 327).

Erin, again, showed a very clear insight into this performance of woman due to her status as a transgender woman:

For a while, I let me femme identity, like, leak into the rest of my clothing because I thought like, ... “I'm femme and I'm cute and that's great and that's making me heaps of money at the moment”. ... I tend to date ... fairly butch people, or like non-binary lesbians, or even, like, on one occasion, a trans masc lesbian. ... I think that it made me feel like ... I was just reproducing that heterosexuality from work. ... I was sort of selling myself short because ... it wasn't very real [or] very authentic. Like, I think it felt cool because I was transitioning. ... I can prove that I can be really feminine ... but it didn't feel enormously authentic to the kinds of relationships that I was having or, like, how I felt about myself. ... I've always really enjoyed, like, being a tomboy with my tomboy girlfriend and ... us both being, like, kind of tough and that just being really cute. ... I got way more into ... baggy boy sportswear and I pretty much universally only buy that men's underwear that you can get from Kmart (laughs). ... I've seen [that] in so many butch lesbian closets. [I] always wear spiked wristbands and I, like, have the most absurdly large carabiner in the world with my keys on [it]. ... Just shit like that like leaning into mixed masculine and feminine presentation and also leaning back into, like, punkier modes of dressing and just sort of being ok with [that]. (Erin)

The learned performance of woman engaged in by trans women is well documented by writers like Schrock et al. (2005) whose participants showed a keen understanding of the rules of what it means to be woman. Notably, Schrock et al.'s participants, all of whom self-identified as transexual women, felt that their authenticity was restricted by the performances they needed to enact to pass as women (e.g., using a higher pitched voice). This is termed a “taxed authenticity” (Schrock et al., 2005, p. 323). However, as they went further along their journey of transition – from living as male to living as female – they described how “what felt authentic changed to match what was culturally prescribed for the bodies they chose to create” (Schrock et al., 2005, p. 323).

Interviewees thus suggested that wearing women's clothes and makeup shaped their bodies into feminine conformity, which over time, helped feminine gestures feel authentic. Clothing is more than a gendered text; it helps transform the physical body into a gendered vessel. (Schrock et al., 2005, p. 324)

I argue that wearing the clothes and accessories expected of a woman disciplines the body into a womanly performance (e.g., heels impede walking, long fake nails inhibit fine motor skills), at least until the wearer becomes accustomed to these adornments and learns to move more freely within them. Because my participants were switching between the performance of heterosexual woman for work, and their "home selves", authenticity within that performance was rarely achieved. Whilst some participants spoke of crossovers and similarities between their work and home selves, or of not needing to separate the two, only Erin, the transgender participant, spoke of losing a distinction between a work performance of woman and her home self: "Thirty hours deep at the broth and ... there's no longer a meaningful distinction between my self inside and outside of work because there is no outside of work anymore".

Amy initially agreed that her separation of work and home wardrobes was because her own personal style would not appeal to her market in sex work. She later conceded, though, that there was another purpose for this distinction: "It lets me feel like I'm playing a different role as well, I think. I would find it hard to play that type of sexy femme straight girl while dressed in a *Burleigh Barely There* bra, you know".

Most participants spoke about prioritising comfort in their personal lives, and also their personal dating lives, as a sort of backlash from their work – what might be thought of as a rejection of the discipline. This raises questions about the experiences of heterosexual women who, in effect, are performing straight womanhood all the time. Whilst queer women may enjoy a relative freedom from the expectations of the male gaze and, indeed, may actively subvert it, straight women are, in essence, always self-disciplining.

As one of few participants who did not describe herself as queer and slept with men outside of work, Bella expressed the least separation of her home and work selves. She was also the only participant who identified a personal preference for hairless genitals. Interestingly, this proved a problem for her when she worked for a feminist porn company that required a more natural look.

Big Beautiful Women

Women whose bodies do not fit within societal expectations of weight range possess less embodied cultural capital than their thin peers (Gruys, 2019). The commercial sex market largely mirrors broader societal expectations of a woman's body (Stardust, 2015), meaning that lack of cultural capital translates directly across from the field of broader society to the sex industry. Although sexual kinks and niches have the ability to distort this reflection in the market to an extent, as evidenced below, women's cultural capital largely corresponds across both fields. The impact of this lack of cultural capital for fat women is that the normatively correct performance of woman is harder for plus-sized sex workers. As I have established above, woman as a category is disciplined, unnatural, and orchestrated. In a society which views being overweight as a personal failing tied to a *lack* of discipline and self-regulation, plus-sized women are already failing at woman. Active subversion of other elements of this performance then become more of a risk to their cultural capital, in turn, affecting the economic capital available to them. The below accounts demonstrate the links between fatphobia, where respectability, classed expectations, and the oversexualisation of fat women. It has been argued that plus-sized women, in general, are oversexualised and seen as lacking in intelligence (Stryker, 2015; Gruys, 2019). Their perceived lack of self-discipline means that the task of respectability is even more of a challenge.

Harmony, for instance, talks about how she is not afforded the same leeway as "skinny girls" in her performance of femininity. Her use of the word "pristine" illustrates the extra level of discipline she deems necessary for a fat body to overcome the perception of being lazy and uncontrolled.

The way I dress for work, it's not something that I necessarily feel comfortable in. The way I do my make up for work is really different from the way I'd like to see myself. It's very feminine, and same with my hair, I curl it and ... it's all pretty and everything's really pristine ... which I kind of feel like I have to do, as a plus size woman. ... It's the only way that you're going to get new clients to try you ... [so] that you don't look like you're just a gross...

(Kate: Like you rolled out of bed?)

Yeh, the skinnier girls, they just roll up, no makeup, "I'm here!" ... There's a lot more effort that goes into me, and I put in a lot more effort to look feminine than I probably need to, cos I'm so concerned that, like, in my day-to-day life I don't consider myself to dress very femininely ... and I'm pretty obviously queer, I like to think. So I make a real effort when I get there to dress myself as a straight woman. (Harmony)

Harmony goes on to explain that many of her clients are "athletic" and "young", creating more of a juxtaposition between her self-described "squishy" body and theirs. These clients seek her out – a niche preference that they may feel unable to enact in the real world outside of the brothel for

fear of the impact on their own cultural capital as men. When asked how the reception staff describe her to a potential client, Harmony explained that, in addition to just her hair colour, breast size, and race, the receptionist paints a picture of Harmony as an attractive option.

They tend to hype me up a bit more than the other girls ... cos they [clients] hear size 14 to 16 and they kinda go "oh..." (unenthusiastic tone). ... [The receptionist responds with] "oh voluptuous Harmony, she's got curves in all the right places". ... And all the other girls it's like "size 8 D cup", ... for me it's ... words like, "busty, voluptuous, gorgeous". [They] just really advertise that I'm not just like a pudgy person ... which is kinda what they [clients] hear when they hear the size. ... So I just I find that they use a bit more advertising with me.

(Kate: So they're kind of almost trying to um give you a personality in their description as well?)

Yeh not just the fat chick at the brothel ... which I think is good. I think it helps. ... I don't do too well if there's only me introing, which no one does anyway. ... Skinnier girls or, like, our really gorgeous, gorgeous "cash cow" girls, ... they do fine. (Harmony)

Anecdotally, I understand that if a client presents at a brothel for "intros" to workers and there are only a couple to choose from, they are unlikely to book anyone and, instead, walk out. As Harmony describes above, only the most stereotypically beautiful workers are able to secure a booking from a solo intro. I argue that Harmony is able to secure bookings, even in a competitive intro, because she fits within the niche of "voluptuous" in comparison to the other workers on offer. This makes booking her a deliberate choice, rather than a forced offering that a client is settling for. Sex workers like Harmony are keenly aware of the niched, stereotype of woman that they are able to perform and, thus, use their IWC to successfully profit from the predetermined categories available. As a member of the plus-sized category, colloquially known as BBW (big beautiful women), Harmony is denied access to niches available to other queer women. A quick browse of any pornography site plainly lays out these categories and illustrates the barriers for women who reside in more than one of them. The image that Harmony felt she needed to create in order to succeed as a fat woman in the sex industry included "sexy, really sleek, really well put together" aesthetics and "strappy" lingerie, including a push-up bra to make her breasts "bouncy". Harmony also expressed that she felt fatphobia from within the queer community, which included body shaming, and this prevented her from engaging further in this field. When asked to expand on this, Harmony relayed experiences of using dating apps and having fatphobic interactions with queer women, including a potential match explaining to her that she was not interested in "chubbers". Unsurprisingly, Harmony found this interaction hurtful, but she understood it to be a symptom of the broader issue of lack of representation of fat women in queer media. Thus,

Harmony's experience of reduced cultural capital due to her size was not limited to the sex work field, but also created limitations across the field of the queer community.

Elyse gives a similar account to Harmony; because of her size she feels unable to push the aesthetic boundaries that other women in her brothel are able to. She feels an additional pressure to conform to normative ideals as a compensatory measure for her size.

Because I'm not a very thin person. Even doing parlour work, I feel like a lot of the ... boundaries that other queer workers are able to push in terms of body hair or facial piercings [don't apply to me] ... it's always for me been like, I *have* to do this. (Elyse)

Lola gives a similar account:

In terms of ... sucking people in (laughs), I feel like stripping's hard because it's really all off what you look like. And, obviously, men, not all men, but stereotypically men want, like, feminine; and they want, like, curvy; and they want, like, you know, smooth. So if you don't ... typically fit that criteria anyway, cos I'm ... probably ... bigger than, like, the normal stripper anyway, so ... I already feel like I'm at a bit of a disadvantage. And if I wasn't, like, super feminine on top of that, ... I don't think I would make any money (laughs). (Lola)

These accounts highlight the added difficulty in negotiating the field of sex work as a plus size woman and bolster the claims above about the importance of a successful performance of the ideal woman including (perceived) discipline of the self.

Active subversion of the heteronorm

There are two parts to the subversion of heteronormative beauty standards that participants actively engaged in. The first is, in essence, the opposite of what is stated in the above section – when women are not at work, they are no longer seeking the male gaze and are, at times, actively trying to be invisible to the male gaze instead. This is a big part of subversion of heteronormative beauty standards. The other element of this active subversion is of course trying to flag to the queer community that they belong. These goals are often troubled by the permanency or semi permanency of bodily modifications that the women engage in to achieve whore capital in the realm of sex work (e.g., not dying their hair or having obvious tattoos and piercings), and are also linked to the experiences of femmephobia explored in Chapter Seven. The field of queer dating and queer community building requires different forms of capital than the sex work field. Thus, IWC, as shown in this section, is not portable across the fields.

Charlie's account offers evidence of these two main objectives of conscious subversion of the performance of heteronormative woman.

I think it does come down to that as well. ... It's the same. Like, you know, you see a lot of lesbian and queer women who ... don't shave or, you know, whatever ... and so you wanna fit in with that ... so you do that while you can. ... And just, like, really rejecting that straight, heteronormative behaviour. ... I don't wanna engage in that if I don't have to. ... But mostly, ... it's not like I don't want to engage in that because it's straight, it's like I don't want to engage in that for the sake of not engaging with it sometimes! ... It's like just this constant, like, argument. ... Why am I not doing this? Why do I hate this so much? Do I hate this just for the sake of it or, like, do I actually not enjoy this thing? (Charlie)

Crowder (1998) points to an active and conscious choice that occurs for lesbians in the creation of their identities, evoking Wittig's (1992) argument that "lesbians are not women" (p. 52). This goes some way to explaining the discourse in which Charlie and other participants are located.

Thus, there is no lesbian body distinct from the female body until and unless a lesbian chooses to deconstruct the femininity imposed upon her. Coming out as a lesbian means making a decision whether to continue to "pass" or revolt against the feminization (read heterosexualization) of the female body. Since a choice must be made, the lesbian is held responsible by both straight and lesbian society for what she chooses... what so profoundly offends the "heteropatriarchy" about lesbians is not our supposed imitation of men (imitation being the most sincere form of flattery as the saying goes) but the refusal to be women. Lesbians opt out of a heterosexual economy in which men and women mutually define each other. In the most radical sense, lesbians are not women. (Wittig, 1992, p. 52)

Being highly conscious of the way their identities (and their very existence) subverted heteronormative expectations was a common theme expressed by participants. Some spoke of their "femme privilege" which allowed them to move about the world without challenging gendered expectations. This often came at a price, though, with "femme invisibility" denying them the opportunity to connect with other queers in public. When asked if she would wear makeup every day, for example, Frankie initially responded that she would if there was no labour involved, because wearing makeup was her personal preference. On further discussion, however, she expanded on this, describing her queer aesthetic as a purposeful subversion of what is expected of women in public.

At the same time, there's a part of me that wants people to be like, "she's not wearing make up!" You know, and [I] want people to feel uncomfortable and questioned ... by my fatness in public, by my underarm hair, by my shaved hair, and lack of makeup. Like, I want people to be like, "hmmm I'm uncomfortable," and then sort of think, "why am I uncomfortable?" [I want to] take up space that I'm allowed to take up, as a person! (Frankie)

So, again, we see that this subversion of expectations of woman are inextricably tied up in a rejection of the labour required to pass as a "proper" woman. Frankie's subversion of the heteronorm is purposeful and deliberate but, at the same time, it is about comfort and ease; something which, in itself, is subversive of the expectations placed on women. Rather than being "unconsciously internalised" (Butler, 1990), these discursive practices are conscious, deliberate,

and calculated. Frankie has developed a habitus that thoroughly understands the fields in which it engages. As Heineman would put it, “embodiment practices are conscious and tailored responses to biopolitical constraint” (Heineman, 2016, p. 135).

Similarly, while Harmony said that she goes out of her way to dress “like a lesbian”, she agreed that this is a tactic that serves dual purposes as an outward expression of queerness and also to avoid unwanted attention from men:

I don't really express [my queer identity] at all at work, but outside, ... I make more of a point to express it. I wear men's clothes, I wear baggy shirts, I don't really wear makeup that often – I am today but that doesn't really happen. ... I think that's a part of my identity and I find it keeps men away. Like, it stops men from just hitting on you and I find that so uncomfortable when they do. ... I couldn't look like more of a lesbian if I tried. ... Stay the fuck away from me! (Harmony)

(Kate: It's as much about projecting your queer identity as it is about kind of overtly showing that you're not available for heterosexual interactions?)

Yeh definitely. ... It's, yeh, not as much about trying to find women,... as much as it's, yeh, trying to keep men away. (Harmony)

My data support the idea that “liberation from the confines of heterofemininity” (E. Payne, 2015, p. 240) is available as a choice to some lesbian or queer women, whilst being elusive or impossible for others. This can be tied to the masking of queer sexuality necessary to perform as heterosexually marketable.

Erotic performers continue to engage critically with femmephobia, classism and ‘whorephobia’. The deliberately shameless, unrepentant and unapologetic attitudes of many erotic performers (Leigh 2004), along with a high percentage of sex workers continuing to work illegally in many states and territories, demonstrates a refusal to be bound by social and legal norms (Stardust, 2015, p. 70).

While I agree that this is true, to an extent, for all sex workers, I argue that, by virtue of their rejection of the heteronorm, queer sex workers push the boundaries of societal expectation further and more deliberately than cisgender-heterosexual sex workers. It is the intersection of both queerness and whore taint that necessitates conscious, reflexive identity work.

By embodying a queer sensibility and a sense of taste—by wearing the correctly traditional clothes on the correctly shaped body, sporting an appropriate hairstyle, consuming the right food and drinks in the right places—queers express their distinction from each other and from nonqueer others. This malleable queer body is mobile; it is a site of an incorporated understanding, an aesthetic display of this knowledgeable corporeality, and as such it is a way in which identity is constituted as it sediments on the body. (Rooke, 2007, p. 244)

Crowder (1998) notes the way that queer aesthetics illuminate the performativity of all gender:

But in most cases of public cross-dressing, the woman is not appropriating a man's function in the world. Her challenge belongs often to the world of "camp"- that attitude so peculiar to the gay and lesbian subculture. "To camp" is to call attention to the artificiality of gender roles, to mock the very concepts of masculinity and femininity. In camp, as Susan Sontag (1966) pointed out, one creates an aesthetic of artifice. In lesbian camp, the meaning of the role is precisely that it *is* a role, and the dissonance between the "masculine" appearance and the female body is precisely the gap from which meaning is derived. For the lesbian here does not want to "be" a man, or even to "play" a man, but rather to be a woman playing a woman playing a man for other women who, of course, as lesbians, do not want a man at all! (Crowder, 1998, p. 54)

This playful dressing up is something that resonated in the reflexive way that participants understood their own genders and proactively chose their desired aesthetic when moving about different fields. In the next section, I consider participants' understandings of their construction of a queer aesthetic, and how they subvert the role of woman that has been assigned to them.

Construction of queer visual identity

The importance of a queer visual identity is widely documented, and "because appearance norms can enable lesbians to identify each other, shared appearance has aided in the creation of communities" (Hayfield et al., 2013, p. 173). The habitus, as particularly experienced by lesbians, has also appeared in the literature in recent decades. For example, Rooke (2007) states that, "the lesbian body embodying a lesbian habitus is a site where forms of lesbian cultural resources and capitals are incorporated, performed, and rendered with the appearance of being inherent" (p. 232). Further, Rooke adds:

Embodied expressions of lesbian cultural capital work to produce the identity of lesbianism, which is maintained and regulated ... congeals in a habitus that is seemingly robust and innate...The regulatory and relational practices that take place in that space affect the bodies and subjectivities of those who pass through it—what Butler would call "performative acts"—showing that being lesbian is constantly being produced and is constantly becoming. A sense of inclusion is contingent to the extent to which women are able to successfully generate this lesbian habitus and in doing so navigate homonormativity. (Rooke, 2007, pp. 243–244)

This brings to mind Charlie's musings in working out her motivation for dressing in particular ways, and her struggle for authenticity. Charlie identified that her long acrylic nails positioned her as straight within queer communities, and that this restricted her ability to "code-switch", a concept discussed in Chapter Three. Many of the participants identified hair styles as a pivotal part of their self-expression of queer identity. GG had recently cut in a fringe and reported an initial huge drop in her sex work income. However, she believed it important to express herself in this way: "I don't really notice as much anymore, but it definitely [was] a thing. But it's also just really important for me, you know? Because ... work is work, and I'm a whole person outside of that" (GG).

April gave a similar account of the queer power of a haircut, admitting that she is growing out her undercut because it is incongruent with her porn career: “I’ve got the back of my head shaved. It’s sort of been growing out cos when it comes to filming and stuff it’s, like, me from the back looking like a dude” (April). And, E commented: “I literally shaved part of my head so I’d appear more queer (laughs)!” For Alexa, her relationship with her hair is complex:

I wanted short hair when I was, like, I had long hair for a really long time when I was young and then I happened to get, like, very sick and all my hair fell out. And so when my hair started to grow back, the thing I wanted most was to go back to just being normal. So I spent however many years growing it back out to pretty much exactly what it looked like before, and then remembered that that’s not even what I wanted at the time. ... Then I just sort of went through a period of, like, cutting it short and then growing it back to, like, a bob and then cutting it short again. ... And then eventually I just ... was like, nah I actually do quite like it short and so I’ve had it [short] for the past couple of years. ... Even just cutting my hair short took, like, a really long time to sort of accept that. (Alexa)

Alexa’s hair became a symbol of more than sexuality, being tied to her health and her personal agency:

I just feel more comfortable having like my hair short. ... When you put my hair and everything else of me together, I feel like that sort of looks like I’m like queer. I remember ... buying the shoes that I’m wearing now, which are like chunky shoes, and someone said they were dad shoes, which they are. Apparently that’s, like, the term for them. But then I was all like, well, this just goes along with my whole butch aesthetic doesn’t it, ... that that daddy lesbian. (Alexa)

GG had a tattoo of a woman who is enacting revenge on her rapist, which she worried would affect her income.

When I first got that [tattoo], I was like, oh this will be weird for the clients. ... [But] when I’m, like, working and wearing a body suit ... they [just] see boobs and ... [I] realise how much it actually takes ... [for] them [to] have an issue. (GG)

Cassie discussed wearing a lot of makeup for work in contrast to her personal life. Cassie uses the word “refine” in this context, exemplifying Giddens’ (1991) discussion of the significance of late capitalism ideals around self-development and the project of the self. Cassie said, “I think in a way ‘Cassie’, or my dance persona, helped me refine myself more. I know who I am more. [I can] be less apologetic for who I am”.

Paton struggled with wanting to explore her gay identity while feeling that she needed to keep up certain standards of appearance as a stripper. Leaving the sex industry enabled her to “explore” other ways of being.

I feel more free ... as Paton. ... Four nights a week I had to be looking a certain way, and I kind of just stuck to that outside ... of work as well cos it was just easy cos I already had all the clothes. ...

I didn't know that I could be both feminine and masculine and be a lesbian at the same time. ... I didn't know I could explore that and I didn't really know that it was still viable to look like this one day and then look like something completely different the next day, but still be gay and still be me. (Paton)

Where leaving the sex industry enabled Cassie and Paton to freely express their sexual identities, Chloe continues to work in the industry and agreed that it stifles her aesthetic self-expression, whereas April described a significant amount of crossover between her sex work and her queer identity as performed with her real-life partner.

I find that that's really how I assert myself in my lesbian identity to ... just try to be more butch out in public and really just steer into it – walk down the street holding hands and just be, like, out and open like we are going to Mardi Gras ... which is, you know, a really big thing for me to ... especially be out on my personal Facebook where I've got work colleagues from my day job, just to be like, "no, by girlfriend, I actually meant my girlfriend!" (April)

Frankie's account illustrated the inextricable link between self-discipline and the expected performance of "woman" and the rejection of this as queer aesthetic, with her own experience complicated by chronic health conditions.

I suffer from quite a few mental illnesses and depression. ... [I] like simple clothes, I guess, because ... I'm quite exhausted a lot of the time, and particularly not doing makeup. ... I suppose it started as a "I'm so exhausted I can't do this," but now ... its definitely also a bit of a "fuck you". ... I also don't shave my legs or under my arms. (Frankie)

Alexa talks about being most comfortable in men's shirts rather than women's tops which tend to have details or show her stomach.

As I've gotten older, I've sort of just gone more towards ... my general appearance ... [being] more masculine or more androgenous. ... I have, like, a lot of men's shirts and then, like, fairly well always wearing pants and I also have short hair. And it's just kind of like been something that just makes me more comfortable, but then obviously ... it's not feminine. Like, it can be feminine but then it's ... not as feminine as it could be – it's only feminine because I'm saying it is? (Alexa)

Erin talks about the way it is fun to sometimes play with the idea of "work Erin" in her personal life, but noted that the reverse did not apply given the lack of IWC that this would portray:

I don't want my [real] life identity to come into work because, like, in real life, I'm a like sporty, fairly butch lesbian who hates men. ... It's not good box office. ... Because of all of that in my regular life, it's really fun to occasionally be this, like, hyper femme, cute, shy, goth girl that, like, I'm never going to be around anybody but ... maybe my partner sometimes. ... It's fun to pitch that as ... here is "alternative universe Erin"; ... this could be an idea of me. ... It's fun to play with that sort of stuff. ... I guess it's fairly unremarkable that ... a queer girl, and especially a trans girl, would enjoy fucking with identity (laughs). (Erin)

Here Erin shows a high level of whore capital (IIWC) in that she understands the expectations of clients and which parts of herself to contribute within her work time. It is evident that the majority of participants equated their sexuality and gender with their bodily practices, explicitly tied to their habitus. As Crowder states:

If the conventionally feminine or even female body is unlivable and the masculine body unthinkable, then lesbians must recreate the body. The problem is how to do so. One response is to transcend the categories of “masculine” and “feminine”. (Crowder, 1998, p. 57)

Rooke (2007), again, uses a Bourdesian framework to understand the lesbian habitus.

By foregrounding a lesbian habitus, the ways that lesbian identity is made visible, performed, and expressed can be understood as a matter of practices and a practical belief or mastery. In Bourdieu’s terms, it is “le sens pratique,” or “a feel for the game.” This is not an essential aspect of lesbian expression, nor is it so overriding that it can be described as hegemonic, as these expressions are too subcultural. (Rooke, 2007, p. 239)

Bella, however, presents a different narrative. When asked whether she did things to reinforce her sexual identity outside of work, and whether she would describe herself as queer, she responded with uncertainty, asking me to explain, “what is queer?” This can be interpreted as an expression of Bella’s awareness that she lacks the queer cultural capital needed to assimilate into my queer culture within the interview. Bella’s lament of her lack of success in finding women to date can also be seen as a marker of insufficient queer capital (Rooke, 2007). For Bella, who is located outside of the cultural norms and “tastes”, what queer is and isn’t is a question that needs to be answered, whereas, for other participants, embodied queerness was “rendered seemingly inherent” (Rooke, 2007, p. 240).

By making the queer body visible through material and aesthetic processes, queer distinction is achieved through the expression of subcultural competence. Crucially, this expression of knowledge, incorporated over time, emphasizes the endurance and stability of a lesbian disposition... The seduction of the appearance of a lesbian habitus is its apparent stability and innateness. These expressions are powerful as they carry the aura of continuity in terms of bodily gestures and norms. Repetition, then, is about much more than repeating the same classed or gendered dispositions. The lesbian habitus is an expression that is dissonant to the norms of the varieties of a heterosexual habitus. Instead, the lesbian habitus performatively works by offering a way for lesbians to receive themselves in ways that are not familial and yet are classed and gendered. (Rooke, 2007, pp. 245-246)

Crowder’s closing statement in her 1998 examination of the lesbian body states that:

What is most remarkable about all the various modes of revolt against the heterosexual imperative that I have presented here is the degree to which lesbians have assumed that our bodies and even our sexuality can be (re)constructed through a conscious process of making choices. Articulated sometimes within a discourse of the “natural”, these diverse efforts to deconstruct externally imposed definitions of what the female body ought to be show an

underlying belief that lesbians can step outside the endless cycle of the opposition between the “masculine” and the “feminine”, even at the most basic levels of sexual desire. Whether opposing existing definitions or substituting new ones, lesbians have insisted on the right to write the body as a social text. (Crowder, 1998, p. 62)

Here, Crowder uses the work of Wittig (1972), de Lauretis (1987), Nestle (1981), and others to illustrate the idea that lesbian identity is constructed in collaboration with lesbian individuals and communities. The othering of the lesbian body as non-heterosexual, ergo, not defined by its worthiness to a male mate, requires the body to be (de)constructed as separate from “the endless cycle of the opposition between the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’” (Crowder, 1998). In the next section, I shift my focus from queer aesthetics to the bodily practices enacted by participants to perform a *sex work* aesthetic.

What does a stripper look like?

The sex work field has its own rules of the game, equivalent to those of the queer community. Rules of the sex work game are learnt firstly from an outsider perspective, reliant on broader societal understandings of what constitutes a sex worker and what appeals to the male gaze. These ideas are refined when a social agent enters the field themselves, and their habitus uses trial and error to create a successful performance. As Morrow (2012) found in her strip club research, women working in the sex industry are highly astute to the pervasive and stigmatising stereotypes that exist about them, and they can and do choose to fulfill those stereotypes within their work for financial gain.

Sex working women have long been marked by their dress; Nestle, for example, observed that the biblical woman who wore a veil to signify her work, highlights “the wearing of clothes as both an announcement and an expression of stigma” (Nestle, 1987). Thus, we see that clothing and adornments have always included identity expression in their purpose. Nestle continues her comparison of lesbians and sex workers by stating:

Throughout the history of prostitution runs the primacy of dress codes. This drama of how prostitutes had to be socially marked to set them aside from the domesticated woman, and how the prostitute population responded to these state demands, led me to think many times of how lesbians have used clothes to announce themselves as a different kind of woman. (Nestle, 1987, p. 234)

IIWC is, thus, a form of whore capital that exists within the field of commercial sex. The same stereotypes about women who work in the sex industry do not attract financial gain in other settings (fields), such as in the family court system, or with their heterosexual social peers

(Morrow, 2012). Whore capital is field-specific to the sex industry. Paton's account illustrates the way that her habitus learnt what did and did not work in the field of the strip club. Here, she refers to 'Paton' as the character that she played at work:

When I started stripping, I had blue hair, yep, blue hair. I'm covered in tattoos and very alternative looking, cos I'm very, you know, heavy metal, kind of. Always been that kind of girl anyway, and I didn't make any money like that. I didn't make a goddam cent being who I was, so I had to kind of change and become a sex symbol for men. So, ... I went blonde, I got, like, secretary looking glasses. I had to completely change the way that I spoke because I was being too "me", and "me" is gay, so "me" wasn't making money (laughs). ... Paton ... had specific clothes specific lipstick colours that I felt I couldn't wear outside of work. ... Cos, ... well, this is my stripper makeup, this is my stripper hair. (Paton)

Similarly, Elyse describes the aesthetics that she used to enter the industry and how these changed once she learnt the rules of the field of full-service parlour sex work. Elyse is now able to recognise when other workers are undertaking this journey.

I was a tiny baby and an idiot. I wore, like, a short, like those terrible twenty-dollar [19]20s flapper wigs, ... cos that's all I had.

(Kate: Like, in black?)

Yeh, cause I thought you had to be, like, super incognito like a fucking idiot.

(Kate: Like *Pretty Woman*?)

Like getting a cab a kilometre from my house in this fucking wig to interview! ... As, like, an 18/19 year old, I looked like, I was- you look back and you're like, *that's perfect* (sarcastic tone), ... *that's beautiful*. ... I've got photos of me, ... the stuff I wore, oh god. ... And I laugh at it now cos it used to be me, but very much like I find in parlour shifts, there's always one, like, *theatrical* person. ... There's always someone like trying to wear, like, fishnet elbow-length gloves (laughs), or, like, a fascinator or something. ... I's like, "aw that was meeee!" ... The silly girl! (Elyse)

When asked to describe how her work persona has changed from this hyper-stereotyped sex worker, Elyse said that her aim now is to look more like the "girl next door":

I've always played on that. I like to give off the vibe when I come in and I'm talking to the guy that, "we both know this is a little bit silly, but you're here and I'm here, and I just wanna have fun!" (Elyse)

As discussed earlier, V was the only participant who chose not to separate herself into two visual representations with the craft activity. Here, she describes the crossover between her personal style and her performance in the sex industry. For V, the separation is experienced in her "day job" where she feels compelled to hide parts of herself that breach the rules of that field.

I'll just dress how I wanna dress. Like, some days ... if I'm just chilling at home or whatever, ... this is a pretty typical, like, just at home, like, baggy t-shirt. I like being comfortable but, you know, if I'm going out for lunch or whatever, I try to look kind of cute. Like, obviously if I'm at my day job I try to look a bit more officey. ... If it's a show or a bucks thing or something like that, I do try to dress nicely. ... If I know there's gonna be a pool or a spa, I'll wear a really cute bikini, like, try to look a little more feminine, even on the days where I would rather just be wearing jeans and a t-shirt. ... To me, that's a work uniform, ... you can't show up looking like a slob, obviously. ... Cos it's not something I'm doing every day, ... I can just try to make the most of it, ... I'm just putting my makeup on, I can do my hair. ... I can take my time to, like, actually appreciate it. ... I feel like for the girls who have to do it. You know, they're working a twelve hour shift at a brothel or something like that, ... it wouldn't be an enjoyable experience. ... But, for me, ... I get to go to work and I get to, like, dress up, and I'm getting paid to go to a party, like, yeh! ... If I get some extra bonuses, [I'll] be ready, you know, in case I need to do a hand job or a blow job or a massage, something like that. Just, you know, put your brain in the right mindset, just in case. ... It doesn't bother me if I don't make any extra money that night, ... you're getting paid to be there so it's fine.

(Kate: You kind of enjoy that whole process of dressing up and expressing that side of yourself anyway?)

Yeh, I very much do. Like, I love putting on makeup and I like getting ready and I don't go out that much, like clubbing and stuff like that. So, to me, that's kind of like where that comes into it. ... I'm not just going out and getting drunk and blah blah blah and getting ready and all that, it's like, ok I'm actually gonna make some money. ... It's a job, you know, so I gotta just make the most of it. (V)

The difference in experiences between V and other participants can be understood in Morrow's description of the expectations of the strip club clientele:

At one extreme are dancers whose unaltered personalities are profitable with customers and who have thereby found a niche at the strip club. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the many strippers whose primary task in the club is to create a dramaturgical reality in which they emphasize the lustful (and sometimes ditzzy) stereotype with which society associates them and for which many customers pay their entry fees. (Morrow, 2012, p. 357)

Whilst the aesthetic that V embodies provides cultural capital in both her personal life and the field of sex work, she feels the need to amend herself to exist more comfortably in the field of her government day job; these fields are incongruent in classed expectations of a woman's dress. In discussing critiques of a sex work aesthetic, Stardust (2015) ties the arguments of "excessive femininity", made by anti-porn lobbyists, to femmephobia. She lists "acrylic nails, high heeled shoes, breast size and degree of makeup" as markers of this so-called excess (p. 69). She notes that this ultra-femininity goes "far beyond the kind of femininity that attracts social reward in public, so as to instead attract scorn and ridicule" (Stardust, 2015, p. 69). Femmephobia, and its relation to the queer community, is discussed further in the next chapter. Harmony's account shows how criminalisation and policing intersect with class and respectability politics.

I dress really sexy at work; I'll do all black or red or something like that and we have to wear skirts right now. ... We are not allowed to walk out with our asses out anymore, such a shame. ...Yeh, I really miss it (laughs). We used to be able to walk around basically just butt fuck naked, ... but now we have to wear more appropriate things. We can't do nipples, we can't do butt cheeks. Really annoying. ... We had a police visit recently ... and one of the transcripts from another police visit from a place that got shut down, was a police officer in an intro noting what everyone was wearing. ... Like, she was wearing a lime green bikini, ... not wearing appropriate clothes for outdoors or for a massage. ... It was in a transcript from a police interview so we kind of just took it upon ourselves to not do that, ... which has become a permanent thing now, apparently, ... cos its classier. ... It's still a brothel. (Harmony)

These rules of the game, and the field in which they exist, are, of course, temporally and geographically specific. Elyse, who has worked across both Sydney and Melbourne, shows her understanding of that specificity:

I would say mostly a self-confidence thing. ... If I'm at a parlour, I wear false eyelashes. ... Because I've worn glasses and contacts and I've done stage makeup, like, I'm very comfortable touching my face and stuff like that. ... Little things like that make such [a] huge difference so quickly. I can't do the full Instagram contour that I think a lot of young girls these days can do. I'm like, "wow, yeh". Yeh, that is a skill. ... It's different again if you work in Sydney. ... Even in the suburban places where I've worked in Sydney, it's like, yeh, very, very, very high glam. ... I think here, in Melbourne, at least, it's very aesthetic based and very high maintenance but in a natural way? ... Whereas, in Sydney, the most money you will make is [from] the fakey look. (Elyse)

Elyse's account reflects Amy's description of the way queerness permeates the brothel space across the two cities, discussed further in Chapter Seven. Coy (2009), who writes with a goal of sex work abolition, uses her description of sex workers' bodies to further her argument.

The female body that is bought and sold in prostitution has also been subject to conceptual analysis. As Carole Pateman (1988) argues, prostitution is unique in the investment of the self that is required due to the dynamic between sexuality, the body and sense of self. In this approach, prostitution should not be reframed as employment like any other since it is ontologically damaging to the embodied self. O'Connell Davidson (1998) suggests that analyses of prostitution should focus upon the client's power of command over the body rather than the purposes to which it is put, as the power of command over the body is not merely physical but symbolic: that is, the body is bought for the purposes of specific functions. In the commercial sex transaction, ownership transfers from the woman to the buyer who assumes belonging of the body within the parameters of certain (contractual) boundaries. (Coy, 2009, p. 66)

My findings demonstrate that, rather than a transfer of ownership, participants experienced their bodies as a performance – something that they were fully aware and in control of. Coy's argument rests on the connection she draws between childhood sexual abuse (CSA) and "prostitution": "Prevalence of sexual abuse in the women's lives creates a template for the way that the women act with their bodies and demarcate boundaries of ownership and use, which are absorbed into the embodied sense of self" (Coy, 2009, p. 66). In contemporary Australia, however, the rates of CSA perpetrated on girls is estimated at up to one in three (Moore et al., 2015), thus, it seems plausible that CSA is similarly prevalent across the adult women population regardless of

occupation. I argue that women who choose to work in the sex industry have a more robust understanding of the way that women's bodies are viewed in contemporary society, as demonstrated within this chapter. Rather than honouring the expertise of her participants, Coy uses the notion of the "habit body" to position whore capital as a negative:

Stacey constructs a narrative in which the events of experiential significance are those that involve her body being contracted to others for their release and pleasure, or subject to violence, making this a familiar process to her. This creates a psychological landscape that normalizes physical and sexual use of her body through the appropriation by others – the development of a habit body. Thus her habit body is based on psychosocial processes of embodiment that reflect a lack of ownership and self determination. Stacey described selling sex 'as what she knows best', and in doing so demonstrated how this was a meaningful expression of her (dis)embodied identity. (Coy, 2009, p. 67)

An alternate perspective on Coy's (2009) rendering of Stacey's narrative is that her description of sex selling as "what she knows best" demonstrates that she has accumulated the whore capital needed to successfully profit from the patriarchy. In my study, this keen understanding of the expected performance of woman is enabled by the outsider status occupied by the queer woman. In other words, because queer and lesbian women are external to the heterosexual performance of woman and to the expectations of the male gaze, their habit body is able to develop a sound performance separate to their "real identity" as a queer woman. A significant difference between my study and Coy's is the fields of practice in which these are situated. My participants exist in the field of contemporary Australia where, even though selling sex is mostly illegal and stigma is pervasive, the whore community, both online and in-person, as well as the general popular consciousness, is more empowered and more aware of self-determination and self-identity (Diamond, 2022).

Issues of race and experiences of racism

Whilst interview questions did not explicitly focus on race, themes of racism unsurprisingly appeared in each interview conducted with participants who identified as non-white. Cassie was one of the participants who identified herself as a person of colour. Here, she describes the casual racism that she encountered amongst her strip club colleagues, and how it kept her from developing friendships.

I'm trying to like say this in a careful way, but, like, as a woman of colour, sometimes I feel like they weren't really that well informed, and sometimes might say something that was, like, a little bit racist or not well informed. ... I just want to stay away from that as well. ... I definitely valued their company, like, while I was at work, but we just didn't connect outside of that. ... I have my best friend who's also a dancer who is bisexual and she's ... totally fine with it, and she's gone

into dancing and, like, dancing touching⁸ and things like that, so she was just, like, never an issue and everyone else that I'm friends with hasn't had an issue. (Cassie)

While Cassie lacks cultural capital because of her racialised status, by labelling the other dancers as not “that well informed,” and later as, not “politically aware or as educated,” Cassie positions them as uneducated, calling into question *their* capital, and asserts her own class status and higher education level. Her narrative continues:

It wasn't ever really, like, overt racism [aimed at] me personally, but just little comments here and there. Like, I had one friend who I remember her saying to me like, “oh you'll have to teach me some of that ching chong ching chong ching,” and I was just like “mmm we're not friends anymore”. Yeh, so just comments like that. We would do like a stage show which was, like, three songs with, like, costumes and things like that and pole dancing. ... Mine was kind of like a Chinese themed one, which is what I picked. ... and then, I dunno, there was this girl who ... saw me eating sushi, and she's like, “Oh my god you're just so Asian! Like, look at you and you've just got your sushi,” ... and I was just like, mate, ... everyone eats sushi. Like, what's going on here? Yeh, it just seemed like a weird sort of comment to make and I just felt, like, a bit weird about it. (Cassie)

Cassie takes responsibility for the way she is seen as “other” by stating that it was her choice to perform a Chinese themed act, however, the Western understanding of Asian women as sex worker has been a century-long project (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021). Race, in the field of the strip club, exists within a complex interplay of capital. Because of racialised understandings of Asian women as submissive, but concurrently hypersexual (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021), Cassie's choice to perform a Chinese themed show capitalises on these assumptions about her, which potentially provides her with increased financial gain. As Bourdieu explains:

The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms. (Bourdieu, 1980/1990, p. 54)

So, Cassie's experience in the field of sex work can be situated within the context of historical understandings of Asian women. In turn, Cassie reproduces this understanding with her act. Cassie's cultural capital here leads to monetary reward, as she thoroughly understands the rules of the game in which she plays. This can be compared directly to M's experience of working in hospitality where the racialised stereotypes deem her to be lesser than, discussed further on.

⁸ The ‘dancing touching’ Cassie refers to here is sex work that occurs in strip clubs but can also include physical sexual services such as manual and oral sex.

Here, Cassie speaks to her experience of navigating familial relationships within her own Chinese family and her partner's Thai family:

My family know that I am a lesbian and they also knew that I was a stripper, which they probably weren't very happy about because my family is [of] a Chinese background, [a] little bit conservative. ... But I've kind of always just marched to the beat of my own drum, so they're kind of just like, "stay safe, don't do drugs!" (Cassie)

Cassie rejects the norms imposed by the field of her family. I asked whether she felt that her stripping or her lesbianism was harder for her family to accept:

Some of my family was pretty accepting. And some of my family wasn't as accepting. ... My mum, for example, we don't have a very good relationship anyway, but, yeh, it took her, like, a long time to come to terms with my sexuality. ... She was just not really happy about the fact that I was working as a dancer, but then [there] wasn't really that much she could do. Like, I was already kind of twenty one, twenty two [years old] and they live in a different city. But there's definitely family members that kind of avoided talking to me about my work or how things were going. They'd just be like, "oh, how's the weather?" kind of thing. ... So, yeh, I think that was harder for some of them to accept and it has been a little bit dicey at times because my partner did it [as well]. ... Her background is Thai and it's just so much more stigmatised in the Thai community because ... sex workers are really just looked down upon, and even if you would work as a dancer, you know, like that means full-service to them as well which is even more stigmatised. So sometimes I've felt like I can't really be open about myself because maybe it would look sort of suspect that she was in a relationship with me or even that she could have possibly been doing it as well because, like, it just sort of appeared to maybe some people that she didn't really have work or ... it was unclear what she was doing. So sometimes I felt like I had to be sort of extra careful, even if I didn't really care about outing myself, just to be sensitive to her privacy. (Cassie)

There is potential "habitus compatibility" between M and Cassie which protects them from the racism perpetrated by queer Australian women in the white dominated online dating scene, (Li & Chen, 2021). Johnson and Lawler (2005) coined the term "habitus compatibility" to describe the way that class difference presents a barrier to heterosexual relationships that gender and sex do not. We can extend this term to understand both Cassie and M's habitus to have shared "perceptions, thoughts, expressions and actions" (Cui, 2017, p. 1155) due to their Asian heritage, which creates a familiarity in their relationship that acts as a buffer to the "otherness" that they experience in the outside world of contemporary Australia.

There were other strippers who came from Asian backgrounds and things like that who had to be even more careful, who were really worried about their families catching them and things like that. So, I dunno, it was just those small passing comments that I would get. Maybe part of it was because I also did that Asian show that people were, like, really ... aware of my heritage. (Cassie)

M explains that she faced whorephobia from a Thai friend, and that her experience of Thai culture is that there is not an understanding of the difference in roles in the sex industry – everything is

understood to be “full service”. This leads to victim blaming when a sex worker experiences violence.

The problem comes from the people [who] still look down on the sex industry. ... They still [do] not really appreciate or say that this is like a job. ... Even in Thailand, like, everyone knows that we have the sex industry, like the big industry, as well. But those people in there, in the industry, they still can't really come out or tell everybody that, ok, they do full service. ... Even [people who] MC but wearing, like, topless [attire], they can't even say that. ... [If] some accident happens to them on the news, people [are] still like, “oh, it's ... because of you working there,” not, ... “oh, that's because of men”. ... My friend as well, she feels negative about [my] job. Like, she always has [the] question, “Why? Why don't you go and work another job? Why [do you] have to be in this industry? Come on, you're smarter than that, you know”. ... It's hard to hear [this from] someone that I love [who does] not understand. But I also understand as well, I used to be that person. So it's quite difficult to talk to my friend about it. (M)

M talks about the way her perceived racialised status as a stripper gives rise to particular expectations from clients:

When the customer sees me as the Asian, you know, [the] long hair, they always think that the Asian woman [is] gonna please men all the time and that is really conflicting with my personality. Yeh, so sometimes it's quite difficult as well when I get this very short lap dance because I don't really have time to, like, explain or get to know [the client]. Sometimes they're just, “OK, you!” [They] come and grab [me] and bring me there and ... harass me, ... because they think that they can do whatever they want to ... the Asian woman. ... I feel like that's happened all the time and the people [are] quite still racist to me all the time as well. [Or] they just don't want it because I'm Asian, or they ... don't think I'm gonna understand English. “Oh, wow, you're English is very good!” ... You know it's always like that. (M)

When asked if these same expectations of a submissive and subservient worker translated to the hospitality industry, in which M had also worked, she explained that because of people's perceptions of the role of Asian women, she was not placed in customer-facing roles, even though she was, in fact, the worker making coffee:

Most people around me, I feel like [they] kind of understand it, where I work. ... But, ok, when I worked as a ... barista, some people, some customers didn't wanna get my coffee because I'm Asian. ... They needed to hire someone who's white, they can't really make anything, .. just [to be] standing there! To be a prop, and I have to do everything. And we got the same money and that made me pissed off. ... And I asked my, ... like, “why do you need to do this?” and they say that's because my boss [is] Asian as well, ... and one day, ... that white person, [was] not in the shop. Customers [were] just asking about her, yeh, not even asking about me, that I'm the one that would make you your coffee everyday. Wow, really? Really! ... I complain with my partner all the time about, like, the racism. I mean, like, it's not really bad but it still happens. ... It's quite different now, the outside world. Because [I] feel like a lot of like Asian women are really smart and really strong. Yeh. Maybe [it's] getting better and better. (M)

We can see here in this example that M's habitus, and the cultural capital it contains, does not translate to financial capital in the hospitality field as Cassie's does in the strip club. M downplays this clear experience of racism by stating that it is “not really bad” which gives insight into the

normalisation of these experiences in her life. These participants' whose capital is, at times, limited, yet, in certain settings, increased due to the sexualisation of their cultures. The stereotypical hyper-sexualisation of Asian women, in particular, can be "transformed into a valuable resource" (Malheiros & Padilla, 2015, p. 702). Crenshaw's (1991) intersections help us understand the compounding effect that a non-white racialised identity have on one's experience of moving through the world.

It's not about the sex

The participants' lack of discussion concerning the physicality – or material practices (R. Simpson et al., 2016) – of the (corporeal) sexual interaction between worker and client was an interesting element of this study, especially given the contradiction laid out at the beginning of this chapter – the understanding of a lesbian being a woman who has sex with women, but of lesbian sex workers as women who had commercial sex with men. Some participants commented on the (lack of attractiveness of the) bodies of clients, and some spoke briefly about penetrative sex (namely, V, who was careful to reiterate that this is *not* a service that she offers). Others used humour and made crude comments about clients' penises. Largely, though, very little discussion was dedicated to the "sex" in sex work or, for that matter, sex as a lesbian. This is likely because penetrative (or, indeed, any physical) sex actually plays a small part in both the identity of sex worker, and that of lesbian. As explored further in Chapter Seven, identity as understood using a Bourdesian framework, whilst situated within, and inseparable from, the body, is made up of much more. The habitus is a learning, evolving state of being made up of our experiences, our idiosyncrasies, and our position/s within the social, geographical, and temporal fields. McNay (1999) discusses the body's parallel objective and subjective position:

As the point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological, the body is a dynamic, mutable frontier. The body is the threshold through which the subject's lived experience of the world is incorporated and realized and, as such, is neither pure object nor pure subject. It is neither pure object since it is the place of one's engagement with the world. Nor is it pure subject in that there is always a material residue that resists incorporation into the dominant symbolic schema. (McNay, 1999, p. 98)

The absence of material sex

Aside from flippant descriptions of bad breath or unclipped toenails, participants did not speak about semen, or clients' bodies, or sweat. Whilst one participant, Harmony, spoke of cleansing her material body after work using a salt scrub and shower, this separation of bodily experience was surprisingly lacking from the majority of participant narratives. What presented, instead, was a

focus on the layers of clothing, accessories, mannerisms, and so on that separate the work physical body from the home physical experience. Intricate identity practices were more important than the embodied dirt described in previous research, such as Simpson et al.'s (2016) "dirty workers" – garbage men, butchers, and street cleaners. For my participants, the addition of sex meant that boundaries were more abstract and connected to sexuality, a core component of what defines us in late capitalist society. Even though sex work, in most of its forms, relies on the body as a tool, and so much of the anti sex work rhetoric reduces workers to bodies, the actual physicality of having sex barely came up in any interviews. This shows that, for sex workers, the sex act is a tiny part of their lives compared to other embodied experiences. The physical body is only one element of what Bourdieu (year describes as an embodied state.

Actually, Bourdieu refers to an 'embodied state' (Bourdieu 1986, 48) of cultural capital asserting that, 'Most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment' (Bourdieu 1986, 47). However, by claiming that this form of cultural capital cannot be dissociated from the body, Bourdieu is not referring to physical characteristics or beauty, but instead uses them as an analogy for embodied cultural capital as the acquisition and accumulation process involved in obtaining cultural knowledge that cannot be dissociated from the person. In addition, cultural capital is visible through body expressions, such as the use of language and phonetic accent, physical and gestural attitudes in public or even the choice of clothes (Bourdieu 1986). Therefore, the notion of embodied cultural capital provides a point of departure for the idea of aesthetic–corporal capital posited in this text, even though its failure to consider body aesthetics and physical beauty may render it somewhat insufficient. (Malheiros & Padilla, 2015, p. 694).

The body, although an important element of Bourdieu's understanding of identity, is impacted, of course, by the social. As Skeggs explains:

The body experienced is always a social body made up of meanings and values, gestures, postures, physical bearing, speech and language. It is through the body that the child learns intimately to experience wider structural features, which are never just an experience of the structural but always entwined with the child's physical and sexual presence, with its bodily relation to others. This is a dialectical process involving objectification in which some features become objectified over time and form the habitus (Skeggs, 2004b, p. 21).

Conclusion

This chapter has centred the body and the embodied in the experiences of lesbian and queer sex workers through reference to feminist literature from recent decades. In the next chapter of this thesis, I shift focus away from the purely physical to the relational, while acknowledging that relational experiences are always relayed through the body.

CHAPTER SEVEN: COMMUNITY

Introduction

Earlier in this thesis, I began to illustrate my finding that the way lesbian sex workers negotiate their communities is bound by their use of different types of capital. Chapter Five outlined the often intentional and conscious nature of identity work that participants engaged in. Chapter Six explored the corporeal experience of these women; how their physical bodies shaped the way that they were able to express identity, and the bodily practices that they engaged in to navigate fields of practice. This third and final discussion chapter presents participant narratives as they relate to others – both established and recognised communities, such as the sex worker community/ies and queer community/ies, and within intimate dyadic relationships. Whilst it is impossible to separate the self from the other when discussing identity, as made evident in the previous two chapters, this chapter reveals the barriers to full participation in both communities due to a lack of capital; specifically, that which I have identified as whore capital. Here, I expand upon the term “Community Whore Capital” (CWC), and compare it’s function to Morris’s (2017) “gay capital” within contemporary queer communities. I argue that CWC is limited to a field, rather than transferrable across fields, and examine how stigma manifests as whorephobia and homophobia within these communities.

Whore capital versus whore stigma

I propose that a distinct form of capital, called “Community Whore Capital” (CWC), is useful in understanding the identity experiences of queer sex workers. I argue that this form of capital shares similarities with Morris’s (2017) “gay capital”. Morris argued that in the “post-gay” social fields that he studied, instead of what had traditionally been a stigmatised identity, being gay can act as a form of capital. “Social capital describes the cultural resources available to a person on the basis of belonging to a group” (Morris, 2017, p. 1188) and, for this form of capital, that group is the gay community. In Morris’s words:

Cultural gay capital describes insider knowledge about gay cultures, *social* gay capital describes belonging to social groups which are exclusively or predominantly gay, and *symbolic* gay capital describes having one’s gay identity recognized and legitimized as a form of social prestige by others. (Morris, 2017, p. 1199)

Similar findings, regarding the continued currency of these identities in certain social spheres, were reported by Willis in his 2012 study of young Australians who identify as LGBTQ, and Mensah

(2013) who compared the social capital that emerged through the AIDS crisis for gay men with that used by sex workers to resist stigmatising health campaigns.

My conceptualisation of CWC transcends the three forms of capital identified by Morris (2017); namely, cultural, social, and symbolic. It is characterised by insider knowledge that belongs to sex worker networks, and the recognition of sex worker identity within progressive “woke” communities. Unlike Intra-Industry Whore Capital (IIWC), this form of capital is not necessarily easily converted to economic capital. However, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) outlined, social mobility is invariably linked to economic mobility/financial capital, and all forms of capital are legitimised by each other.

A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations “deposited” within individual bodies in the form of mental or corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16)

The multiple whorearchy(s)

The “whorearchy” I write of is not to be confused with earlier use of the term to mean “flagrant female interference in male contests over property and power” (McClintock, 1992, p. 79), suggesting that whores are transgressing their natural place in the social hierarchy to become powerful citizens. Instead, the hierarchy – or whorearchy – of which I write, exists *within* sex worker community/ies but mirrors contemporary societal hierarchies, the privilege and oppression frameworks present in all of our interactions and systems. In what can be understood as lateral violence (Toone, 2018; Tran et al., 2022), McNeill (2012) argues that the whorearchy is hard to define.

Among the few facts about sex work that everyone agrees upon is that there is a “whorearchy”, a sort of class system among sex workers. Now, nobody agrees on anything *about* that system, only that it exists. Many strippers, dominatrices, porn actresses, etc insist not only that they aren’t whores, but that they’re *better* than we are; those whose professions have separated enough from ours that they aren’t even considered sex workers any more (such as actresses and *especially masseuses*) can be very pompous about it. Prostitutes, on the other hand, sometimes see themselves as better, smarter, more discreet, etc than strippers or porn starlets; sugar babies and other halfway whores deny that they’re sex workers at all; and some unusually self-deluded escorts will even try to draw imaginary lines separating themselves from other hookers [emphasis original]. (McNeill, 2012, para. 1)

Knox (2014), a porn performer, explains the rungs of whorearchy as relational to proximity to police and clients:

The whorearchy is arranged according to intimacy of contact with clients and police. The closer to both you are, the closer you are to the bottom. That puts “outdoor” workers, ie street-walking

prostitutes, at the foundation. They are disdained by “indoor” prostitutes, who find clients online or via other third parties. They are disdained by the strippers and escorts who perform sex acts for clients, who are disdained by those who don’t. At the top sit sex workers who have no direct contact with cops or clients, such as cam girls and phone-sex operators. (Knox, 2014, para. 4)

Yet another definition is offered by Sawicki et al. (2019):

An additional form of marginalization FSSWers face due to whorephobia is based within the ‘whorearchy’. The whorearchy is arranged according to intimacy of contact with clients as well as intersections of other marginalized identities. (Sawicki et al., 2019, p. 363)

Sawicki et al. (2019) illustrate the significance of the body in the structure of the whorearchy. As I argued in Chapter Six, the corporeal is an integral part of the exchange between sex workers and their clients. Queer Australian sex worker, Tilly Lawless, also discusses the structure of the whorearchy in the contemporary Australian landscape, listing sugar baby work as the least stigmatised role.

Sugar baby work is the most accepted as it is the closest to marriage in that it mimics monogamy and usually involves the exchange of material goods over cold hard cash...Of course, these rungs aren’t set in stone, and the order varies from place to place.

The whorearchy comes from both within and outside of the industry; non sex workers will view certain workers as dirtier/more disposable/less worthy of respect than others, and sex workers themselves will often throw other workers under the bus, in order to distance themselves from them and make themselves seem more respectable...While you will find people of all different races, backgrounds, genders etc in all different kinds of jobs within the sex industry, racist and classist assumptions feed into the whorearchy. (Lawless, 2016, as cited in Sciortino, 2016, para. 6-7)

As Lawless (2016) points out here, the whorearchy is unstable, temporal, and geographically differentiated; a recognition that is especially important to this chapter and consistent with a Bourdesian inspired understanding of the sex work community/ies and surrounding societies as fields of practice. Whilst the whorearchy may be understood as a somewhat abstract structure due to its instability, it is important to remember that it has real and dangerous consequences. A study by Johnstone (2007), as one example, surveyed men who participate in the buying of sexual services. The study found that the men’s attitudes fall on a “continuum of negativity” that can be directly compared to the risk and experience of violence faced by sex workers across different sections of the industry (Johnstone, 2007). Those closer to the top of the whorearchy face less risk of violence than those at the bottom who are less protected by the law. Of course, the whorearchy also mirrors Rubin’s (1984) hierarchy of acceptable sex, discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Five.

Participant accounts of the whorearchy

Sasha gives an account of her understanding of the whorearchy, from her position as a stripper in Adelaide, and the journey she took starting out as a burlesque dancer before entering the strip club:

There's a lot of burlesque dancers who strip as well, or vice versa. You know, they started stripping and then got into burlesque through that. There's definitely a lot of crossover and ... that's where burlesque came from, the roots, and it's also where stripping came from. They both evolved alongside each other and, unfortunately, we do still get a lot of burlesque dancers who are like, "I'm a classy stripper," and, you know, that bullshit. ... I suppose that's the same as the pole dance community. I'm not a pole dancer but I know that there's a lot of, like, whorephobia there. (Sasha)

Sasha explains the difference between the two industries and the way that burlesque, which some would say is ranked higher in the whorearchy, if not above it altogether, distances itself from stripping: "like, classic burlesque stuff that comes through when you're performing. Like, you know don't open your legs!" (Sasha). Here Sasha is referring to the different movements that are deemed acceptable in the realm of burlesque versus stripping, and the way that burlesque performers label themselves 'classy strippers' to reinforce their position of acceptability in the whorearchy.

Frankie, also from Adelaide, describes the hierarchical nature of sex work – which I identify as lateral violence – that makes up the whorearchy:

There's a huge class thing and it always surprises me when, within marginalised groups, they in another way will discriminate, cos they're like how can you discriminate [against] "XYZ" and then they turn around and do it in another way. You see it in a lot of queer circles and stuff like that. ... Marginalised people will cry out about that and then, you know, have certain racist views [that] they're happy to hold. ... And there's a bit of, you know, clique stuff happening in that you can definitely see the, like, higher class escorts [engaging in] discrimination ... [against] survival workers especially. ... They're a worker too! They're doing the same thing as you are! (Frankie)

Cassie, for example, was careful to use the term "dancer" instead of "stripper" whilst talking about her past sex work career performing in a strip club.

The whorearchy, discussed briefly in Chapter Six as it relates to class, is a culturally produced tiered system in which sex workers are ranked according to their area of work and the sex acts that they engage in. Traditionally, the level of bodily contact one has with clients has an inverse relationship to the level of stigma or whore taint that one experiences (Stryker, 2015, p. 98). So, an escort who may or may not provide penis in vagina (PIV) sexual services, but whose main role is to accompany a client on "dates", has less whore taint than a brothel or street sex worker who

performs short, full-service (PIV) bookings. A stripper who works in a “no touching” club, is positioned as morally righteous over a stripper who is allowed, and encouraged, to provide “extras” (e.g., manual sex in a private booking space within the club). There is a generalisable consistency between this structure of whorearchy and the wider social class system (Sciortino, 2016).

I argue that the whorearchy *within* socially connected, Western, queer, sex work communities can play out in the opposite direction too, as it is a discrete field separated from mainstream contemporary culture. Just as Morris’s (2017) gay capital exists in the “post gay” British high school field that I would argue is not representative to contemporary society as a whole, contemporary sex work communities, and, indeed, queer and other politically aligned communities, exist outside of normative structures. That is to say that they are fields of their own with separate and sometimes contradictory values, and, therefore, cultural capital. In this study, CWC was attributed at higher levels to sex workers who had also earned more whore taint. Take, for example, Lola, who had been stripping for a short amount of time, and had not participated in any “contact” forms of sex work. Lola approached the interview process with what I perceived to be a high level of humility – she acknowledged her “privilege” multiple times throughout the interview in an almost embarrassed or self-conscious way. Similarly, the interview participants who had worked in more stigmatised areas of the industry, wore that like a badge of honour. This inverted whorearchy is connected to the question of who gets to speak for sex workers, an issue that I touched on in the context of peer research in the methodology chapter. The hesitancy to claim their identity shown by some participants likely relates to this issue. For example, Ava, who had worked in brothels and as a private full-service worker, said: “I’ve definitely felt a bit of imposter syndrome. .. Like, I don’t mind what others do but, for me, I feel like I’m being an imposter. ... I never wanna be like a tourist in someone else’s experience” (Ava).

This inversion of status tied to historical stigma brings to mind the term “oppression Olympics”, which, as defined by Hancock, “is an evocative term to describe intergroup competition and victimhood” (2011, p. 4). Some contemporary sex work communities have a sound understanding of intersectional theories, and so oppressed identities can become weaponised. Yuval-Davis (2012) asserts that identity politics can be taken to mean the greater the level of marginalisation faced by a group, the more revered, or “pure”, it becomes within the structure of identity politics (p. 48).

The knowledge and perspective of sex workers who exist higher up on this reverse whorearchy is privileged as *more pure* by other workers. Sex workers then (and, particularly, queer sex workers) are positioned in leftist, politically-minded queer cultures as the height of oppression and, therefore, possess social clout; in Bourdieu's terms, this is cultural capital. GG, speaking about her experience of "cool queer inner North Melbourne" says:

It's now, like, social capital to be a sex worker, and a lot of people who I know have done fucked up things to sex workers in the past have then become sex workers. And I think it's in a way, like, just avoiding that accountability. ... So it's strange cos people will ... put a lot of effort into learning the language and all of that, so ... you don't immediately know that ... they might be whorephobic but it all reveals itself. Eventually. (GG)

It is of note, however, that this inversion of whorearchy may only exist within certain fields, namely, contemporary, queer, leftist, Western – or even more specifically – Eastern Australian fields. Data released in 2022 by Rodriguez shows that for her *OnlyFans* performer participants, the traditional whorearchy is still a salient structure (Rodriguez, 2022). The way that sex work communities interact with contemporary queer communities is discussed throughout this chapter.

The sex worker community/ies

Participant narratives illuminated the significance of community and relationships with other sex workers to the experiences of these women. Whilst some participants spoke of the joy, solidarity, and kinship they found in peer relationships, others reported that the *lack* of connection to other sex workers impacted on their experiences of sense-making when it came to their identity as sex workers. GG, in her account of sex work friendships, emphasised that the "sex with men" part of the work was far less significant than her relationships with peers:

Yeh, I find the actual, like, having sex with men part is such a tiny [pro]portion of being part of the industry. ... I have a lot of sex worker friends and, ... that part, no one ever really even talks about. Like, we do when we want to, but it's more ... [about] what being a sex worker means or the frustrations. As for the actual having sex with men part, like, it's something that, I dunno, just gets [sidelined]. (GG)

Similarly, Lola, who started stripping when she turned eighteen, found a sense of her place in the world in the strip clubs in which she worked, and this was an important motivation for her decision to stay in the industry.

I do like going into work. ... I'm friends with a lot of people at work and I think the environment's really fun. ... I like the whole sort of community of sitting out the back and eating, like, a bag of

chips or (laughs), you know, talking about the customers. ... And I really feel like it's almost when I started stripping, I ... found my people or something. People who are really similar to me. ... I always struggled [with] ... having close female friendships. Like, I was friends with a lot of guys and once I started stripping, ... I made all these female friends, and it was like I'd found somewhere that, like, I really could resonate with the other women. ... I like that part of it a lot. (Lola)

Chloe, who was only open about her sex work with a “handful” of people outside of her workplace, found a real sense of solidarity with her fellow workers:

I find the girls at work like a really great source of support and comfort, regardless of the fact that I'm queer. You know, we're all in the same boat together there, ... whether it's relationship stuff, whether its ... dating, dealing with an asshole guy there, like, ... it's the kind of connection I've never had before in any other work setting. With girls, with anyone. It's like this connection is just amplified and I think accelerated so fast, like, because you're so vulnerable, intimate. ... You know it's, it's amazing. Like it's really, ... it's really something else. (Chloe)

Ava also emphasised the power of having friends who are also sex workers:

I've got a very supportive partner who is proud of all my experiences to date and encourages me to be more open. And before that, yeh, I was outed by a family member and it's the quickest way to make you become more clandestine around those experiences. But, yeh, ... it's important for me to pick and choose when [to disclose]. ... I'm not so out that I'd be like, “hello everyone! I'm having a coming out party!” But I think that, especially if I knew I was talking with another sex worker, it would be important for me to identify as a peer. ... I wish I had had more people that I could have lent on or just had a yarn with about some of the stuff that happens. ... I've got a beautiful friendship circle who are very accepting, and a lot of them, [and it's] not their fault, just wouldn't get it. ... I often have conversations with other workers now about things ... like stealthing. ... I knew that the thing happened and that it felt terrible, but I didn't even have a word for it then. And I wouldn't have told anyone or I didn't realise it was ... assault. [I was] really green but even now I'm like learning things about my historical experiences and that's only through peer networking. (Ava)

The way that sex workers band together and label themselves as “peers” can be understood by what Korczynski (2003) calls “communities of coping”. This is evident in Chloe's description of being “all in the same boat together” and her suggestion that these relationships are “amplified” by the nature of the work. Korczynski's (2003) communities of coping were involved in service work, such as call centres, characterised by a distinct divide between customer and worker, and the direct exposure of workers to the wrath of unhappy customers. In such contexts, workers turn to each other for comfort and understanding, thus creating a community of coping. As Avenatti and Jones (2015) argue, the healing nature of sex work does not only apply to clients but can also apply to relationships formed with peers.

It is clear to us through our experiences, research and conversations with clients and workers that many sex workers provide therapeutic spaces and experiences for their clients. Additionally, many sex workers provide healing for themselves and their communities. Sex worker communities are necessarily insular because of criminalisation and stigma. These relationships often include advice on screening and safety, practical tips of the trade, training in particular

skills, commiserating about less-than-perfect clients, and providing advice on creating an efficient business model. (Avenatti & Jones, 2015, p. 91)

Stardust (2015, p. 68) references Fawkes (2007) in her discussion of the “girls’ room” as a space for feminist discourse and solidarity, and we can see this in the above accounts. On the other side of the coin, however, exclusion from or lack of a peer network or community can be a very painful experience. Cassie, for example, did not form vibrant supportive friendships in her time as a dancer. Instead, she reported feeling a disconnect between herself and other workers:

I felt, like, a real disconnect from the other girls that I worked with. I guess, like, our interests were so different. ... It sort of sounds bad, but ... I just felt like we didn’t have anything in common like a lot of the time. ... They would just talk a lot about, like, plastic surgery of which I haven’t had any, or, like, appearance sort of based things which is just not really that important to me. And also just like some of the stuff that they would do with customers, ... I just don’t wanna involve myself with someone who’s, like, exposing themselves to that kind of danger or making really bad decisions, or someone who’s doing drugs, like, regularly. Obviously, that’s their choice and I would never judge anyone for that, but just for me personally, like, I’ve never done any drugs and things like that so it’s just ... maybe not meshing as well with how I like to have fun. So even though I had those co-workers, ... I only saw them a few times, like, outside ... and it just didn’t really go anywhere. I’m not really in contact with anyone that I used to dance with. ... There were other girls who were, like, lesbians and ... maybe I would see them sometimes at lesbian events, but I still just felt like our priorities in life were just so different. (Cassie)

While Cassie spoke about appreciating the company of others within the workplace, those relationships did not translate to a feeling of kinship or community. E confessed during her interview that she had never – in real life or on the internet – met another sex worker. While having engaged in sex work for five years, she explained that she had always worked privately and had never had the opportunity to meet a peer, but that she would “love to” do so in order to be able to share experiences. In an attempt to connect with other workers, she had enquired about brothel work, but noted that all required her to wear high heels and she was “not that kind of person”. Thus, for E, her reticence to play the ideal woman, as discussed in Chapter Six, excluded her from finding a community that could offer support. Charlie shared a similar story, observing that the internet was her main source for connection with other workers:

There’s a couple of people that I know from ... online. ... Over the years, like, I’ve had, you know, *Tumblr* when that was a big thing. ... Since then, like, *Instagram* and *Twitter* and that sort of stuff, so I’ve met people within those environments. ... I see people interstate, like, people who I know are sex workers, ... and they do ... double bookings and all this sorta stuff, and I’m like, I wanna do that! I wanna do that! ... It is hard and I know that. ... I don’t make it known that I’m a sex worker so then it limits people that I can connect to and really talk to about it and open up about it. (Charlie)

Alexa also highlighted social media as her only connection to the broader sex work community. The value of the internet in community creation was discussed by Rodriguez (2022) in her study of

OnlyFans (online only) content creators. Interestingly, all my participants referred to the importance of online community, regardless of their mode of work. Not being “out” as a sex worker was also highlighted as a significant barrier for finding community. While choices around coming out are discussed later in this chapter, Charlie’s account here illustrates the barriers to finding community:

I think I’ve almost secluded myself, like, and I’ve done that to myself. I’ve really pulled away. And I know that there are, like, a few other sex workers in Adelaide, especially in the queer community, who I would probably would get along really well with, but I’ve purposefully not put myself in situations where I would be in those same circles. I think cos ... I don’t wanna, like, accidentally out myself. ... I still find, like, that internal, like not only that internal homophobia but that internal, like, whorephobia. Like, just that ingrained stuff that you just can’t shake where it’s, like, I don’t want to be known ... [as] a sex worker within the queer community. Like, I wanna be known as myself, who is a sex worker but I don’t want to be known as this person’s a sex worker. (Charlie)

I will return to Charlie’s reference to internal whorephobia and its correlation with whorephobia within the queer community later in this chapter. Another participant spoke about her hesitancy to engage with the sex worker community because of a previous, now ended, friendship with a “large main figure”, well-known within the sex work industry. Because of this, she felt unable to engage in “those circles”. Whilst sex work communities can contain wonderful elements of advocacy, skill sharing, and solidarity, just as in any other socially formed community, these coexist with experiences of exclusion, hierarchy, and oppression, as discussed next.

“It’s like a little secret, that everyone’s kind of gay” – Queerphobia or acceptance in the brothel

When I explained my own personal tactics of acting “straight” within the whole brothel – including the girls’ room, rather than only in interactions with clients – Amy agreed that she begins acting as her sex worker self long before any client interactions:

I can relate to that a lot cos when I do still work at the one kind of suburban brothel I work at these days, even the kind of casual outfit I will wear to wear in is still, like, one of my more femme outfits I would wear at home. ... I’ve generally put all my hair in and my makeup on before I go ... cos I don’t want to stand out or draw attention to myself in that way.

I’m pretty out in all of my life and, yeh, when I worked in call centres or book shops or whatever, that’s been great. I’ve been totally out and, like, never really thought twice about it. Whereas, yeh, I think something about the fact that you are in an intimate naked, sexy space with other people [makes it different]. ... I know the brothel in Sydney where I’m definitely not out, ... you don’t want to be seen as being queer in case you’re, you know, perving on other people or you’re some kind of sexual predator. I think that’s the kind of reason I would be more in the closet at work there. (Amy)

Ava also kept her queerness secret in the brothel space.

Some people [who] knew that I was in a relationship with a woman didn't always feel super comfortable. Because, in the earlier days when I was still doing, like, doubles with women, ... I didn't stop doing it because I was enjoying it, I just didn't want these two parts of my life to blur. I was worried that they'd think that I was a sleaze or that I was getting more out of it. ... I didn't experience queerphobia but I think I expected to so I was less open. (Ava)

Here, Ava perceives the brothel space as a field in which her queer identity would negatively affect her cultural capital; a perception linked to her habitus, developed through her negotiation of other fields. Harmony, when asked whether she suppresses her queerness in the field of the brothel's girls' room remarked that, "yeh... I just feel like... the conversation is just too hard". Suppressing her sexuality within the heterosexual space is the way she, and Amy, and Ava have learnt to move around the field.

Here we see the way that gay capital, a valid form of capital in particular leftist social communities, may not transfer across fields, particularly not into the field of sex work, or, more specifically, the field of peer relationships within brothel spaces. There are clear limitations to the political "wokeness" of sex worker communities. The homophobia (perceived or experienced) can be understood as lateral violence (Toone, 2018; Tran et al., 2022) perpetrated by one oppressed community (sex workers) onto another (queer people). Due to the sexual nature of both identities, this lateral violence may be an attempt to reclaim sexual normativity by creating distance in an attempt to preserve respectability. Both sex workers and homosexuals appear on the "outer limits" of Rubin's diagram of sexual acceptability, whereas their opposites (non-commercial sex and heterosexuality) are in the "charmed circle" (Rubin, 1984, p. 152). This is reflected in Erin's account of the attempts at heteronormativity she observed in trans brothels between the trans women sex workers and male clientele. Erin's description of her trans colleagues being "relentlessly ... excitedly straight" points to the constant struggles for "outer limit" identities to move toward "charmed circle" positions – an opportunity that is perhaps only available within the confines of the brothel. Erin, again, speaks of the attempts to move away from queerness that she witnessed in her work:

People sort of rush to avow their sexualities in the trans brothels that I've worked in. I have no idea why. ... [It's] actually really, really funny. ... I did meet a lot of girls in trans work who are like, not just like relentlessly but excitedly straight, and it's ... weird. Like, ... people who are just so fucking proud of being straight. Like, eurgh.

(Kate: Do you feel like you have to come out as a lesbian or as a dyke or ... ?)

I don't feel like you have to, and I've, like, met girls ... in trans work who are just very guarded about their shit, but I think I kind of *like* to and I have no idea why. I think it's sort of important to me that people don't include me in their, like, "oh my god that client who just came in is so

fucking hot”. Like, I kind of need people to know to miss me with that. Like, especially when they ... seek my input and I’m just like, “he’s fucking gross, everyone who’s walked in today has been fucking gross”. (Erin)

While these accounts highlight the queerphobia present in some sex worker spaces, many participants also spoke of positive interactions around their sexual minority status. GG, for example, described the brothel as a more accepting workplace than others, perhaps reflecting the apparent over representation of lesbians in the sex industry (discussed in Chapter Three). GG confidently asserted her estimation that 70% of sex workers are queer:

I think that you can definitely feel it. I think the stat’s like 70% or something of people, like, women working in the sex industry are LGBT. And, I dunno, I think that when you’re already marginalised, I think it can be easier. ... Things have definitely changed like significantly and ... we are living in a very lucky time to be queer, but it can still be difficult in [the] everyday workplace. ... I feel like the sex industry is a very accepting thing. ... It’s an easier place to be just who you are because there’s a huge amount of diversity and everyone’s there for their own reasons, and, I dunno, there’s less judgement? (GG)

Similarly, Cassie said that, “I think that most of the dancers were ... bisexual. ... Like, I did meet several other dancers who identified as lesbians, so I don’t think it was ever really an issue”. Lola, too, who came out as queer after working in a strip club, explained that:

So, if anything, I think stripping made me much more gay. Yehhh. ... In the place that I work, like, there’s a lot of queer girls. ... I would say like 80% of people are queer that I work with, ... which you’ve probably found similar. I feel like it’s like a little secret that everyone’s kind of gay (laughs). (Lola)

Paton also felt supported in the strip club when she came out as gay; support she had struggled to find from friends and family:

They were probably the best support that I had because they really just took my word for it straight away because they’re all actresses as well. ... Most of them aren’t fricking turned on by them [clients] whether they were straight, gay, whatever. So I think I got so much support in the industry because they understood why I was there and they knew I didn’t have to be straight to do what I was doing. They understood that because they were doing exactly what I was doing, regardless of their sexuality, we are all being employed, we are ... working, period. Regardless of the job, it is work, so I had so much support from everyone in the club. ... And the men that I worked with were fantastic. The deejays, security, they were so respectful of my sexuality and they were seeing me naked twenty four seven, and they never even looked at me in a way that made me feel uncomfortable. ... I think it was a perfect time for me to start stripping when I came out. ... Although it was confusing at the start, it ended up really benefiting me, my having that support network. (Paton)

These participants have, thus, found space for themselves within sometimes inhospitable fields. As Tilly Lawless (2018), writing in *Archer* magazine, eloquently expresses:

What do you do when the spaces in which you should belong don't accommodate you? I build a nest within them: a concave in the intersections, warmed with fronds and friends, and the beating of bodies of those who accept all of what goes into me: not just the sex work, not just the queerness. I'm used to having to build my own spaces, by tooth and nail, stiletto and pen. A small space clawed out of an unforgiving, formidable cliff is not unusual to me. Queers are used to making little spaces where we can shut out the rest of the world, and huddle with our friends like babushka dolls, packed tight and finding belonging in numbers. Sex workers are used to pseudonyms, and layers of knowledge about fellow whores- an intricacy to intimacy that means you know what a person's labia looks like inside out but not the name their bills are addressed to. We work among the coded language of sex acts, encrypted messages, and a kind of political organising that prioritises our privacy. Solidarity and confidentiality shield us, together, from the rest of the world. (Lawless, 2018, p. 77)

These varied accounts show that gay capital is valid within some sex work workplaces and fields (perhaps due to the presence of many queer workers), whilst leading to a deficit in capital in others. Just as workplaces outside of the sex industry have unique social norms and "rules of the game", not all brothel spaces or strip clubs are consistent in the value placed on different types of capital, as discussed next.

Barton's (2001) remarks on the apparent existence of women's desire for other women in the sex industry provide a fitting ending for this section.

Strikingly, in the sex industry, a microcosm designed for men's pleasure, queer desire among women is not only condoned in most settings but actively encouraged. After extensive observation, and lengthy conversations with sex workers, I learned that there was no single explanation for the slippery contradictions of queer desire, but three main channels women traverse (sometimes floating blissfully down a gentle current, and other times falling headlong over a waterfall) to the pool of queer sexual subjectivity. In brief, the environments of strip bars and peep shows offer women easy access to other women, invite them to break taboos, and simultaneously teach them disdain for men. (Barton, 2001, p. 5)

The coming out process

There is a plethora of available literature on the experiences and choices around "coming out" for queer people (for example, see Schneider, 1986; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000; Gray, 2014). This includes that which focuses on the experience of femme women who may not have physical markers that communicate their sexuality (Blair & Hoskin, 2015). Some attention has been paid thus far to sex workers who face a similar choice about revealing a part of their identity (Sanders, 2004a) and the political nature of these decisions (Mensah, 2013, p. 97). In this study, participant narratives highlighted the extent to which these decisions are complicated by stigma, legislation, and family culture. For Elyse, the decision to be mostly out was influenced by her "idealism" as well as the practical difficulties of hiding her only income stream.

So I've always been pretty out, and again, I think that was partially being young and idealistic. But ... I'm glad I didn't agonize over it, and I've just always been, like, ... do what you want with it,

because it was my full-time job. I wasn't studying, I didn't have a straight job, ... like I didn't have excuses. (Elyse)

While some participants, such as Elyse, Erin and Amy (all residents of Victoria where sex work is somewhat legal), were open about their sex work in the majority of spaces they occupy (including social settings, queer communities, and families of origin), others carefully negotiated the (non)disclosure of their sex work. Chloe, an Italian woman who had been working in the erotic massage industry for a number of months, wondered if dating on apps would be easier if she was able to be more publicly out about her work:

If I was more out in general, I probably would do that, but ... there's only you know a handful of people [who know]. Oh, probably a bit more than a handful now, but it's, like. My family don't know ... because, you know, then I think, well, what if I'm on *Tinder* and someone that I know that knows my family sees me on there and I've, like, outed myself. And so that's why I've sort of kept it more under wraps, although I feel like it would potentially weed out a lot of people that aren't [accepting], so you wouldn't have to go through that rigmarole. (Chloe)

She keeps her work a secret from family and this affects her ability to be honest with potential lovers:

Cos my family is Italian, ... I know it would just be like the end of the earth kind of thing and, oh, I dunno what would happen actually. There is a sort of a fear about it. And then not being out, say at Christmas just gone, having those conversations with relatives and, like, "how's work going?" ... I still am in retail as well, but, yeh, my main income actually is sex work now so I feel like I'm lying and leading this double life and that can be challenging ... to navigate, I guess. ... I've definitely been concerned about people that I have told. These couple of girls [I told] that ... it's all gone pear shaped with, they have this really private information about me, and I don't know what they're going to do with that. I'm hoping that they're gonna keep it discreet. ... And that's another thing going forward, like, whether you choose to share this information or not because ... if they don't receive it well, then it's like, oh you've said too much now. (Chloe)

Chloe discussed her decision to post on a 'lesbian Facebook page' seeking queer clients, despite having heavily guarded her sex work status and not being out much at all. When this resulted in a booking made for a woman by her trans-masc partner, Chloe described feeling "thrown" because of how authentic she felt herself being.

It was a really interesting experience. ...Like I, it was like, it really threw me in a way because it felt authentic...Which is not, what I had been accustomed to, and look you almost do get a little bit desensitised, seeing guy after guy and then it becomes after a while just another penis like..Um but to be with this woman that you know I, I wouldn't have made, I wouldn't have been attracted to per se in the real world, but the fact that she was a woman, it changed my whole approach.

Lucia was the most secretive about her sex work, and her identity more generally. Her interview occurred over Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and she was the only participant who chose to keep her camera off during the interview. Lucia kept her job as a stripper secret from her family and her friends, only sharing this part of her life with her intimate partner.

Outside of that world, I never said that I'm a stripper because no one knows that, [even] any friends. ... Any close friend that I met in Melbourne, for example, ... they don't know that I was working as a stripper during all these years. I always lie and say that I work ... in [the] room service area in the hotel, for example. Always at night (laughs). ... Yes, I was worried about the judging, and maybe jealousy because of the amount of money [involved]. ... If I say that, maybe someone is gonna say, "oh, give me money," or like, "you can just give me a hundred dollars," ... so I prefer just to [not] say anything to anyone. Just my partner, my girlfriend. She was the only one [who knew]. (Lucia)

When asked if she declares her sex worker status on her dating profile, Charlie positions her decision not to do so as both a risk mitigation strategy (given that she works in a criminalised setting in South Australia) and her "own issue", implying that this solely rests on her personal experience of her identity:

No, definitely not. ... I'm actually just genuinely so scared of just being outed. And so it would probably be something that I would tell someone, like, on a third date. ... I would not tell someone first, like off the bat. It's really like a "ok now like I've got you" (laughs), and ... any longer and it becomes a lie, kind of. Especially, you know, like, when ... it's such a big part of your life, it's hard to not disclose that sort of stuff straight away. Like, you've got stories and stuff that you just wanna, like, communicate about, and you can't without disclosing what you do. ... It's definitely like my own issue ... that I struggle with. Like, my own identity and not wanting to be outed, like, ... just wanting to control all of that. (Charlie)

Presenting a different approach regarding her status as a queer woman and a sex worker, V chose to be neither wholly out nor wholly in. V's account thus mirrors the non-western negotiation of "coming with", rather than coming out, as described by Huang and Brouwer (2018), that pushes back on the dichotomous model of coming out or being "closeted" by negotiating a sort of half-way mark between both options. In this way, V is out as queer in her social circles, but maintains privacy about her sexual relationship in the confines of her family of origin.

These narratives show the complex decision making that occurs for sex workers when navigating their identity. Revealing a sex work occupation runs the risk of stigma as well as the concrete legal implications of working in a criminalised setting. As has been observed in other studies (e.g., Murphy et al., 2015), whilst no participants talked about hiding their sex worker status from current partners, most talked about concealing parts of their work. Lucia, for example, concealed that she had moved from a no-touch venue to a "touching club" as a dancer. After developing romantic feelings for a regular client, something which she also concealed from her partner, Lucia

disclosed her status as a lesbian due to feeling guilty about the deceptive nature of her relationship towards her client:

In the end, ... what I said to him, it was a lie. Because he used to ... like VIP hours. I used to go VIP for two-three hours, and I didn't dance, just talk, talk, talk, talk. And then, at the end, ... I told him the truth. I said, like, "well I'm lesbian, I do this ... for money," and he felt a little bit [disappointed]. ... I had to be honest because I felt a little bit bad because I was, like, lying to him every time every time, and now it's so drainful. It was so hard for me, cos that person didn't look [like] a bad guy. ... So, yeh, it was shocking for him, but it was [also] because I developed a little bit of feelings [for him]. (Lucia)

Some participants also spoke about not disclosing to their partners when negative things happened during their sex work role, for example, if a client was aggressive or violent. In order to keep their partners from worrying, they felt it best to shield them from some of the more negative realities of the job.

Differences across fields – geographical and temporal

Although comparing geographical locations was not the purpose of this study, because the majority of participants resided and worked in either Melbourne or Adelaide, dichotomous patterns did emerge. Melbourne sex workers, for instance, exist in what has been called a "two tier" system (Begum et al., 2013) of illegal and legal work. This is because the laws governing sex work are specific to the sex work industry as distinct from other industries, such as gambling, liquor licencing, and so on. Because the licencing regulations for sex work businesses are relatively strict (including mandatory health checks), many operate outside of the law, meaning that workers are criminalised. Despite this two-tiered system, Melbourne remains politically advanced when compared to Adelaide where laws governing sex workers have barely been amended since 1976, despite frequent political action over the last two decades. South Australian laws effectively make all sex work, other than stripping, illegal. The cities of Melbourne and Adelaide also differ in their population (4,976,197 and 1,402,393 respectively [ABS,2021]) and their vastly different socio-political landscapes, both of which were apparent in the narratives. The first major difference was the preference or description of terms that participants used to describe their sexualities. The term "queer" was much more common in Adelaide narratives, with some Melbourne participants remarking that "queer" can be understood as a highly politicised "tourist" population – "tourist", in this context, referring to someone who is a voyeur in communities to which they have not solely committed. Melbourne participants also remarked on the left-leaning queer scene of the city, in which it was very hip to be a sex worker, or to know of sex workers, thus corresponding with

narratives of shared experiences with vibrant, queer, sex work communities. One shifting community norm that Elyse identifies is the use of language:

I've always so strongly identified with very much butch-femme and the role that femme sex workers played ... in the lives of the mass people around them. "Queer" always felt just not accessible. It just, it didn't, it felt, you know, "you're too poor". ... I think a lot of other queer sex workers I know who are maybe, definitely thirty-five and over, definite-maybe thirty and older, agree. And then very much everyone under twenty-eight ... is like a complete other century. (Elyse)

Here, Elyse illustrates a generational difference in understandings of, not only the word "queer", but also the way that queer identity has become more prominent than other LGBTIQ identities, like "lesbian". For Elyse and her friends, seven years becomes a "complete other century" in terms of language and cultural norms. In contrast, the majority of Adelaide participants reported a lack of in-person sex worker communities, instead, turning to social media platforms, such as *Instagram*, for their sense of community. In Adelaide, where sex work is criminalised, it was more often the case that individuals weren't out to their friends and didn't have sound sex worker or queer networks. The levels of social isolation for queer people in Adelaide are linked to the conservative politics and comparatively small population of the state. When I asked Elyse if she put a rainbow flag in her dating bio to signify that she is queer, something common amongst Adelaide dating bios, regardless of political alignment, she said that, "The rainbow flag, I guess, amongst more of a radical queer community's quite gauche. It's a ... little bit capitalist, a little bit 'Pride'".

The role of the field in the lives of participants is evident here. There appeared to be a normalisation of sex work in the Melbourne queer community – sex work becomes a natural progression expected in the queer habitus. Traditionally, scholars have understood habitus to be something that is largely formed in childhood (Coppola, 2015). It follows, then, that the career choices of the habitus are chiefly influenced by families of origin (Coppola, 2015). Counter to Coppola's focus on natural family and their effect on the habitus, I argue that being queer is itself a marker of the habitus. Further, the phenomenon of a second coming of age, post-coming out, associated with queer temporality, means that the queer habitus is also influenced by queer culture (and chosen family), rather than family culture. This goes some way to explain the way that queer cultural norms influence career choice and, hence, as seen in the Melbourne cohort, may increase individual pathways into sex work. Despite the whore taint, for the Melbourne queer community, the cultural capital of the label "sex worker" retains its value as whore capital outside

of purely sex worker spaces, and is translatable within queer circles. This may reflect recognition of the rejection of heteronormative assumptions of women's submissive sexuality or, more likely, the rise of "woke" identity politics within queer circles that seek to be visibly politically progressive. Due to the smaller population size of Adelaide's queer communities, and a stark difference in population density, the norms of the Melbourne queer communities are not translatable to the Adelaide context. We see here that cultural capital (in this context, gained by participating in sex work) is not stagnant within the fields, but is ever evolving.

Amy, who has talked about travelling to South Australia for personal reasons, and not wanting to engage in sex work in the state due to the criminalisation of the industry, was surprised that this particular research project was not based in Melbourne.

I think I was just surprised it was in Adelaide, cos I was ,like, that sounds like something someone should be doing or is doing! ... I guess [I] thought that wasn't where it would be happening. I'm like, "it's definitely happening at Melbourne Uni, right"? (Amy)

Outside of the experiences of my participants, this difference between cities can be seen in the rise of sex worker politics in queer life in the eastern states of Australia. Publications like *Archer* (a queer women's magazine published in Melbourne) now regularly feature the writing of queer sex workers (e.g., Lawless, 2018). Similarly, three books have been published by lesbian or queer identifying sex workers, all from the eastern states of Australia, within the last two years (Therese, 2020; B. Green, 2021; Lawless, 2021). To my knowledge, Adelaide does not currently have a queer magazine, and there is a dearth of representation of Adelaide sex workers in the queer literature. This is a simple example of the difference between the fields of the queer community across two geographical spaces. As well as the differences that we can observe across states, differences occur on much smaller scales from workplace to workplace. These workplaces can be understood as their own distinct fields, As Huppatz (2012) observes, "at the most micro-level, local workplace cultures (that vary between shops, companies, institutions etc.) may produce differently articulated habituses depending on the interactions, norms and behaviours that are produced in each specific space" (Huppatz, 2012, p. 16).

Examples of this can be found in participant narratives, such as Elyse, who has worked across brothels or parlours in both Sydney and Melbourne, and speaks of the different expectations for body hair maintenance, further illuminating the geographical bounds of different sex work fields:

I think that's like a reflection of that class system, so if we're gonna talk Melbourne, ... Boardroom and Gotham would be the two places that are known as being fancy ... and they

would be the ones that are, like, the most stringent. ... So, yeh, let's use body hair as the main metric here, or, like, hair length on your head. ... [In] other places, ... management won't tell you that's not okay, you just might have trouble getting shifts or they won't really help you get bookings, ... or they'll be a bit cold. Whereas at those [fancy] places, they'll either bring it up in the interview or in your first shift, or say ... "we sell razors, you can get on or get off". (Elyse)

Amy, who had also worked across Sydney and Melbourne, described differences between brothel cultures even within Melbourne.

I kind of stick to myself there, but when I do talk to people, I would say I'm bisexual. I would never say I have a girlfriend even though I do, and that's cos it's a way more suburban, like, older crowd. Just not a queer hub. ... Fuck it, there's like ten queer brothels in Melbourne (laughs). Yeh, I mean, I don't really make friends there. There's one other girl [who] said to me, ... "oh, I saw you on Tinder," and I was, like, "heyyyy". (Amy)

This demonstrates that fields are both temporally and geographically specific, and that sociocultural fields impact on the ways the habitus moves around. Despite globalisation, cultural differences still exist across physical places. The overarching field of the contemporary Australian community is discussed in the next section.

Contemporary queer communities, respectability, and its rejection

Contemporary Australian queer communities exist in a quickly shifting landscape. Within the lifetime of most of this study's participants, Tasmania became the last jurisdiction in Australia to decriminalise male homosexuality in 1997. Then, in 2017, the so-called Marriage Equality referendum was carried out, showing that 61.6% of the population who voted (almost 80% of the eligible population did vote), felt that gay and lesbian people should be able to marry (Greenwich & Robinson 2018, p. 260). A whopping 38.4% responded no to the same question. Amidst these legal changes, Australia has of course experienced significant cultural changes in the way that queer people are represented in media, (un)protected from discrimination in the workplace, and allowed to freely move about in communities (J. Thomas, 2019). Despite the gains made, attacks on LGBTQI populations are still frequent, with the Religious Discrimination Bill (including sections enabling religious schools to discriminate against trans and queer students) being tabled in parliament as I write this in early 2022 (Australia Introduces Contentious Religious Anti-discrimination Bill, 2021).

Concurrently, social media, and particularly *Instagram*, has grown significantly over the last ten years, and with this, the emergence of internet subcultures on *Instagram* itself, as well as *Reddit*, *TikTok* and *Tumblr*. Niche communities now have the ability to form in an online space and

communicate news and opinions across the globe instantaneously, and micro-communities can be found for almost any cross section of identity, interest, age, and location. In this way, the internet has “opened up new arenas to explore and record queer life” (Killen, 2017, p. 58). The field of social media now plays a complex role in the development and expression of identity, particularly for young people (Bates et al., 2020). I argue that *Instagram* has become a major alternative publishing platform for queer sex workers to build community, share resources, and discuss issues. This has led to some queer sex workers cracking into the traditional publishing format after building a presence on social media (e.g., Therese, 2020; B. Green, 2021; Lawless, 2021).

The impacts of this changing landscape for navigating communities were identified by a number of participants. Elyse, for example, when speaking about how sex workers are perceived in the queer community, responded as follows to the question: do you think it’s easier for queers?

I think that thing of like, “oh it must be easy for you cause you can separate it”, like, on one hand, yes, the sexual stuff, but the rest of it, ... and I guess I don’t want to pretend that every quote-unquote “lesbian” or, like, woman of queer experience, has the same thing. But when you realise, like, how terrible ... the patriarchy [is] ... and how like, ... most men view women as, like, chattel, and how you could just be perfectly happy never speaking to or interacting with one ever again and it would no way diminish your quality of life (laughs), I think that’s where it grinds on you. ... Like, you’re in a bad place, you come across some SWERF stuff and you’re, like, hmm, points to consider (laughs). Like, maybe time for a week off, ... maybe time to save some money, because ... there’s this really crap dichotomy we get pushed into of, like, it has to be empowering, or it has to be exploitative ... and there’s no real room [for any other view]. And especially, I guess, in like [the] queer scene, you have to be, like, “double-I’m fine”. ... I don’t know how shit straight women have it, but I think we have a different set of standards to be a happy hooker. ... You know, because there’s always, like, your girlfriend, or your ex, or your best mate being like, “well, you, yeh of course you’re gonna feel that way cause it’s unnatural for you cause you’re gay so you should just quit”. Um, it’s like, you still don’t get how, like, it’s still not natural for any- ... yeh, no-one’s there [for fun]. Well, I mean, I’m sure some people are ... but, like, you know, that’s a minority. Good for them. ... Actually, I would like to not see or be seen by straight people and I’d like to ... go live far away. ... But, um, it’s a thing, I feel very, proud, it’s a nice history to be part of, I think it’s super cool. (Elyse)

Echoing Elyse’s summation of shifting community attitudes to sex Amy’s account evokes the CWC that I describe in this thesis:

(Kate: So you feel like that’s really kind of shifted because of the rise of intersectional feminism?)

Yeh, absolutely I think it’s almost gone the other way where people wanna have a sex worker friend or date a sex worker its, I dunno, good for their cred. (Amy)

V, again, agreed when asked whether she felt that community attitudes towards sex work are changing.

Yeh, and it's something you can be a bit more proud of, like the whole "fuck you, pay me" type of thing, stuff like that. It is becoming a lot more empowering. I think there is less judgement about things. Like, I do get girls Dming⁹ me on Instagram, and being like, "hey can we talk about ... how you negotiate, ... how you do stuff like that?" (V)

Here, V's words "fuck you, pay me" reference a line, originally from the movie *Goodfellas* (Scorsese, 1990), that has been repurposed by sex workers in everything from the title of a play to wearable merchandise, to cross stitch designs. For participants who are geographically isolated, the internet provides a portal to camaraderie in common experience. Paton, for example, associated finding other queer sex workers on *Instagram* with a sense of belonging as "this is where I'm meant to be". Queer identity is, thus, not only (or not at all) tied to sexual practice, but rather encompasses a range of dimensions, especially community belonging. As belle hooks stated:

queer as not about who you're having sex with, that can be a dimension of it, but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live.(hooks, 2014)

On the other hand, the broader queer community is experienced by some as a political and policed community. Hence, in next part of this chapter, I discuss the queer community as a place that is not always femme friendly, has limits to its leftist politics, and can be experienced as an exclusionary clique for the working classes. As shown next, a surprising number of my participants reported no sense of connection to a queer community, while others described a tenuous link, and others, still, an immersion into queer culture.

Femmephobia

Identifying as "femme" allows lesbian sex workers to pass as heterosexual, a necessity to earn economic capital in the field of sex work. At the same time, identifying as femme in the field of queer communities brings its own challenges, including femme invisibility, femmephobia, and accusations of internalised misogyny or patriarchal oppression (Blair & Hoskin, 2015). Viewed through Bourdieu's lens, these phenomena can be understood as barriers to securing cultural capital across fields. Each field of practice has its own logic and (often contradictory) "rules of the game" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984), so a social agent who may possess high levels of whore capital, enabling successful navigation of the sex industry (IIWC) or sex worker community (CWC), may not

⁹ DM/DMing: Direct message/direct messaging, a social media function to communicate privately with other account holders.

have the same successes in the queer community. Indeed, it may be that the exact elements of their habitus that produce success in one field that deny them entry to the other, as explored next.

The identity label of “femme” has been documented in sapphic literature for many decades and is intrinsically linked to a binary relationship with “butch”, or, in other words, “as a complement of butch identity” (Levitt et al., 2003, p. 110). Emerging in lesbian communities in the 1950s, femme persists in queer communities (Levitt et al., 2003), although Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2017) presents a modern, somewhat revolutionised, definition:

Femme: A person who has one of a million kinds of queer femme or feminine genders. Part of a multiverse of femme gendered people who have histories and communities in every culture since the dawn of time. A queer gender that often breaks away from white, able bodied, upper middle class, cis ideas of femininity, remixing it to harken to fat or working class or Black or brown or trans or non-binary or disabled or sex worker or other genders of femme to grant strength, vulnerability and power to the person embodying them. A revolutionary gender universe. (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2017, para. 1)

As discussed in Chapter Six, the majority of participants presented an understanding of the physical markers necessary to be identifiable within the queer community – a “queer look” – and most made choices about bodily practices with this in mind. This included modifying their hair, failing to remove body hair, and getting tattoos and piercings. Femme, though, can complicate this stereotypical “queer look”, and, as such, often leads to invisibility within the queer community.

The femme attachment to feminine aesthetics has complicated their relationship to LGBTIQ communities and to the politics of queer identity. In contrast to lesbians who eschew normative femininity, and are thereby visible as queer and labelled as ‘mannish’, femmes often continue to embody the femininity expected of them as women. This superficially normative femininity has produced tensions in relation to not only femme belonging in queer communities but also in terms of who can belong in the category ‘femme’. (McCann & Killen, 2019, p. 135).

McCann and Killen (2019) argue that femme identity is part performance and part imitation – arguably the same tactics used by sex workers in general, and queer sex workers in particular, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Surprisingly few of my participants used the word “femme” to describe themselves, despite possessing physical markers and speaking about experiences that fit within the above definitions. I assume that this is inferred without being said, or that perhaps the term is becoming culturally less relevant in contemporary Australian queer communities. Of the five participants who did describe themselves as “femme” (Charlie, Erin, Sasha, Elyse, and Amy), two used it in reference to the invisibility that they encountered in queer communities (see McCann & Killen, 2019, p. 135). Two used the term to describe the role they play at work:

I would find it hard to play that type of sexy femme straight girl while dressed in a Burleigh *Barely There* bra, you know. (Amy)

My work identity is, like, hyper femme and very cutesy and ... very girl next door, and kind of like traditional, almost. (Erin)

Erin also referred to femme as a part of an identity that she had previously tried out, but ultimately rejected as 'inauthentic' for her: "When I started working again as a girl, ... for a while I let me femme identity, like, leak into the rest of my clothing because I thought, like, ... "ah I'm femme and I'm cute" (Erin).

Elyse confidently used the term to describe not only her physical appearance and choice of bodily markers, but also her sexuality, tied to her class, her sex work and her romantic relationships.

Charlie explained that she is sometimes mistaken as straight in queer spaces because she has long acrylic nails.

Normally I have like acrylic nails and ... there's this whole thing, you know, obviously with, like, gay women. ... If you have long nails you still have a short one, ... or you still have two short ones. ... I don't [do that] because I see that as ... outing myself. ... Normally, I have really long acrylic nails, and ... that's for work and also just for me. (Charlie)

Other participants did not use the descriptor of "femme" but, nonetheless, identified ways that femmephobia (experienced or expected) had changed the way that they negotiate the queer community. Sasha felt that she was not able to express herself sexually within the queer community, or wasn't seen as a sexual being, due to femme invisibility:

If anything, working in the industry made me more sexual, to be honest. Like, I suppose it's interesting because being seen, you know, sexually ... at work is something I don't get in the queer community (laughs).

(Kate: As a femme?)

Yeh. I guess I enjoyed being able to be seen as a sexual object, you know, being objectified ... because, you know, we don't get in the queer community which is just insane. So, yeh, and even though ... I'm, like, eurgh, I don't want the men who are [objectifying me], it's just like being seen for being a sexual person and being able to seduce people. Like, yeh, [it's a] different feeling cos that kind of shit just don't happen in the queer community for a femme, you know? (Sasha)

Here, Sasha illustrates the freedom from the queer community's femmephobia that she experiences within the strip club space, enabling her sexual self to be validated despite her queer sexual preference. I argue that the model of erotic capital developed by Hakim (2010) is overly simplistic in its positioning of erotic capital as portable across fields. The above narratives show

that even women who have built a career on selling their eroticism do not breeze through other fields in contemporary society using the same habitus.

Paton, who had worked in a strip club until her female partner expressed discomfort with it, talked about the power she felt when harnessing her sexuality in a commercial transaction:

So I find more enjoyment actually performing ... sensual movements, sensual style, flow, anything to do with, like, sexuality and my body in front of men because I actually find it feels better ... for some reason. ... Yes, which is weird cos ... I like dancing for my girlfriend, and that's completely different, but that's more of a connection and an emotional thing. But when I want to feel sexy, I want men to see me naked, which is weird because ... I don't want them. ... They don't turn me on whatsoever. So, yeh, I found that interesting about myself too because, ... at first I was very like, "ew they're pigs and they're disgusting," and then it kind of turned into something like a power source for me, and I really miss that, to be honest. I really miss having that in my life cos I feel I don't get that from women. (Paton)

Both Sasha and Paton's "erotic capital", as Hakim (2010) would name it, is not transferrable into their personal lives and, therefore, it exists solely as IWC. While their habitus enables their successful navigation of the field of sex work interactions, this does not carry across into a mastery of lesbian relations.

The phenomenon of femmephobia is well documented in the literature (Levitt et al., 2003; Blair & Hoskin, 2015; McCann & Killen, 2019). For example, Stardust (2015), argues that the queer community's femmophobic rhetoric mirrors similar arguments as the anti-porn lobbyists make about representations of femininity as reinforcing misogynistic beauty standards. Queer sex work participants in Stardust's (2015) study reported that their sexuality was questioned because of their decisions around bodily adornment (wearing high heels, for example). The very aesthetics that bestows capital in one sphere (economic capital in sex work) deny cultural capital in the field of queer communities. As Nestle stated, "If, in the straight world, butches bear the brunt of the physical and verbal abuse for their difference, in the lesbian-feminist world, femmes have had to endure a deeper attack on their sense of self-worth" (Nestle, 1992, p. 15)

Femme is also a gendered sexual identity that is specifically classed (Weber, 1996) but defies social bounds, writes Stardust (2015, p. 70). Reflecting on femme, Elyse observes that:

Because I've always so strongly identified with very much [the] butch-femme [notion], and the role that femme sex workers played ... in the lives of the mass people around them, "queer" always felt just not accessible. It just, it didn't, it felt, you know, "you're too poor". (Elyse)

Here, Elyse secures her cultural capital by situating herself within community formed structures that position her gender identity as valid and supported by a long history (Levitt et al., 2003). This

cements her as part of the community to which she belongs. Her sex work career, intertwined with her physical appearance, is seen as integral to this community position, rather than in opposition to it. Other participants, who may not have access to this history, display less assurance about their belonging and, therefore, struggle to lay claim to the cultural capital on offer. That Elyse lives and works in Melbourne may also reflect the impacts of geographical variation on the “rules of the game” as well as the recognition of capital in a field. For instance, Elyse’s powerful account of challenging potential new lovers by wearing fake nails to their first dates illustrates her attempts to manage femmephobia: “If I’m going on first dates, sometimes I do really like to test them and I’ll deliberately get a long manicure to be, like, you know, ... this isn’t gonna change later, this is me” (Elyse).

The data presented here shows the way that physical appearance troubles the way that queer sex workers navigate both fields, and leads to an uneasy relationship with the queer communities that they attempt to engage in.

Whorephobia and biphobia – rigid understandings of sexuality

Whorephobia experienced by queer sex workers within the queer community can be understood as another example of the non-transferability of capital across the fields of sex industry and queer community. The participants’ accounts of their experiences of whorephobia attract social stigma and present barriers to intimate relationships. For example, Elyse was spoke adamantly about her experiences of exclusion from lesbian communities and the reasons she saw for that: “By virtue, I guess, for being a sex worker; never really feeling that the mainstream lesbian community was an option for me” (Elyse).

When asked about how sex work has impacted her dating life, April said:

I have had issues in the past ... when I first started dating someone. [It] was the night I was meant to go and interview for my first stripping job and it ... became an issue from the get-go, and that’s why I didn’t start until I was 20. ... I was 18 when I wanted to start, and it straight away became an issue. ... Finding myself as both queer and a sex worker, it was something that I always wanted to do. [There] was that learning curve of finding someone [as an intimate partner] who was going to be supportive of it, which I found the most in other sex workers, so it has been hard to do that. (April)

Charlie felt that there was a distinct difference between the whorephobia of straight people and that of the queer community; expressing that sex work was often perceived as a kind of betrayal, as though a queer sex worker is “not being truthful or loyal to the queer society”.

(Kate: You're kind of batting for the other team?)

Yeh! Yeh! ... [In] the straight community, it's mostly just that it's ... still shameful, it's looked down upon. Whereas ... [it's different] for the queer community and I guess those things sort of stem from the same ... emotion. (Charlie)

In Charlie's view, straight whorephobia and queer whorephobia have separate roots. For her, whorephobia from queers hinges on a perception of deceit or disloyalty – "It's like a betrayal, ... it's almost seen as like, ... I wanna say, like. *sinful*" – whereas the straight community is more concerned with shame and stigma. Charlie had experienced this in intimate relationships as well as friendships, but felt that a change was happening within the queer community:

So [with] my last ... long term partner, it, like, didn't go very well and ultimately she was just basically like, "I don't want you to do this anymore" ... and I told her, like, quite late into the dating scheme of things. ... And, when I told her, she ... didn't want me to do that anymore. Basically, [she] was like, "if you want to be together, ... you're not going to do that". ... That was hard for me and that was ultimately like toxic behaviour, like [a] red flag. ... We dated for 18 months, and so for 18 months, like, I was just doing, like, online content and that was ... the compromise. ... Since that relationship ended last year, ... everyone I've told, I've had really good reactions from. And I think the change in that over the last, like, since I first started doing sex work, ... it's like the change is huge! (Charlie)

Illustrating the always shifting rules of a field, Charlie contrasts her fears when her sex worker status was accidentally revealed to a close friend, with her friend's actual reaction:

I was sort of like freaking out a bit about it the next day, ... and they were, like, "I don't care". ... You know, I'm just always like, "urgh this is gonna go badly," ... they're gonna hate me or they're not gonna want to be my friend anymore, or they're gonna give me some criticism that I'm not going to be able to handle. (Charlie)

Evidencing the existence of CWC is the shift in perception that has occurred in some circles, as illustrated by Charlie's reflection above. Whereas previously, being a sex worker within the queer community was seen as "shameful", in contemporary, queer, leftist circles influenced by the rise of social media culture and identity politics, being a sex worker can now provide social clout.

There is a sense that you're either with the queer community, or you're fraternising with the enemy (Bradford, 2004) – the "enemy", in this case, being straight men. Current expectations of behaviour within the queer community are also linked to the extensive history of gay people, in particular, striving for "gay respectability" as a way to secure human rights (Russell, 2015). Historically, the gay rights movements has sought to position homosexual individuals as closely aligned with the perceived values of the heterosexual majority (Toone, 2018). What occurs here is the same as earlier discussions about communities who occupy the outer limits of sexual

acceptability attempting to align with individuals within the “charmed circle” to avoid stigma (Rubin, 1984).

Ava has chosen to keep her sex worker status a secret from queer partners for multiple reasons; most notably, her sense that they “just wouldn’t get it”.

Even though it was a queer relationship, it had all of the makeups of a heteronormative conventional type relationship, and I knew that my time in the industry was gonna be short-lived. I knew that I had ... to make a decision, and I just didn’t think this person would get it. Yeh, there have been other relationships where I haven’t been working where I’ve still chosen to disclose. ... It really just depends on someone’s literacy around ... different groups. ... You can kind of get a sense of where people lie on that spectrum of acceptance ... through that way that they talk about other people in public or, like, the length of someone’s skirt. I’m like “ah, ok, cool so that’s sort of slut shamey” or ... I might just keep that to myself. The person I’m with now is a woman but is bisexual and is super understanding and is proud of this kind of stuff. But my last relationship was with someone who was a bit older and, like, identified absolutely as a lesbian, “gold star”, never been with a cis man, and would be very threatened by [my work], or, like, couldn’t, like, wouldn’t understand it, especially if I was doing it concurrently. Cos it’s like ... that’s dirty, or ... you’re not gay, or it just would invalidate our relationship in her eyes, I think, or even threaten it. (Ava)

Here, Ava refers explicitly to a generational divide experienced in her romantic relationships and the influence of biphobia on her previous partner’s understanding of the fluidity of sexuality. Speaking as someone who has lived through almost a decade of social norms (rules of the field) in queer communities changing around her, Amy discusses how her sex work – which used to threaten her cultural capital in this space – is now valued by the community. Thus, the very same lesbian friends who were “judgey” and spoke behind her back when she started work in 2013, are now publicly supportive of sex worker rights:

I think we’ve had a big shift in the whole kinda intersectional feminism thing. ... All the lesbians I knew were so judgey, ... which was surprising to me because I met so many queer women working [in the sex industry] ... and I think my friendship circle changed accordingly. I started hanging out with hookers instead of [the] roller derby lesbians that I’d been hanging out with before that, ... and it’s been very funny to watch all of those groups kind of becoming more progressive, and suddenly everyone is sex work inclusive. ... I’m like, “well you weren’t back in the day!” (Amy)

To describe this in scholarly language, “the logic and values of a field are not explicit, pre-set, or delimited but rather are always at stake, being continuously redefined through struggles over the control over a field’s forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic)” (Rooke, 2007, p. 240). Shifting community views on sex work were a common theme across participant narratives but were particularly marked among those who had worked in the sex industry over a long period of time. Amy feels that the initial disgust towards her profession was related to the physical aspects of the job; the “touching dicks for money”.

I started out doing BDSM work before I was doing full-service and that was fine cos that was being perceived as, like, beating men up and not having sex with them even though we *were* doing sexual stuff in the dungeon. And when I switched from that to doing brothel work, everyone I knew was like “why, why would you?” and couldn’t understand that it was sort of similar sexual labour – [it] was just ... using different body parts. (Amy)

I asked Amy whether she felt that the physical sexual contact in “full-service” was what made it incompatible with people’s understanding of lesbian. Amy related a time when a relationship with another woman had ended because of her move from dominatrix work to full-service sex work.

I think that’s probably accurate. I think most people or, you know, anyone who is being judgemental about things like that probably don’t know how things like dom work or strip clubs work, and how much sexual kind of labour [is involved] – how many dicks you’re grinding on in the lap dance room. ... They probably don’t know what full-service sex work actually looks like. ... I think, for civvies, they don’t know how similar it all is and how it’s all performing sexual labour. So, [to them], it’s all about are you touching dicks or are you not touching dicks. (Amy)

Amy notes that the queer field has somewhat moved past this whorephobia and being a sex worker can now earn you social clout. Where once she had had relationships with queer women end due to her work, now it doesn’t feel like as much of a barrier.

I was talking to a person on *Tinder* recently and I had to do the, “by the way I’m a sex worker,” even though ... we were following each other on Instagram by this point and it’s, like, quite obvious, and they were like, “oh yeh, I know and I’m totally fine with sex work”. I’m like, “of course you are, like ... yeh, “random Brunswick non-binary person,” of course you are. “I don’t even need to talk about being cool with sex work, cos I’m so cool with sex work!”

Alexa, who identified as bisexual, discussed being recently dumped by her boyfriend. Alexa described feeling like she “already kind of struggles with relationships due to not having good role models”, and a relationship breakdown occurred when, six months into the relationship, she revealed to her straight male partner that she was working in the sex industry in a camming capacity. She cited fear as a reason for not telling him earlier (fear of losing job prospects, and of his reaction), and he reacted in anger and perceived it as a betrayal. Prior to this, she described feeling “pretty cool about myself” doing sex work, but this reaction made her feel “like a whore” for “choosing” her income over a relationship. Alexa’s grief over the loss of this relationship highlighted her lack of a sense of community belonging, something well documented in the lives of bisexual people (Gonzalez et al., 2021). Paton also talked about the stigma associated with whorephobia. Despite finding pleasure in the attention she got from men while stripping, she feels the need to lie about this in order to protect her status as a lesbian:

I told a lot of people that I hated it and I did it for money. ... I hated it, and it was disgusting, and it made me feel shit, and I really bought into that ... to make other people feel comfortable with what I was doing. To be able to have people understand that it was a job ... so I could be a lesbian

and a stripper, yep. ... The only way that I could find peace was by lying and saying that I hated the job, and that I was kind of forced to do it. (Paton)

For Paton, the transactional nature of the interactions becomes the way in which she is able to justify these interactions with men:

I could justify it to myself, yep, cos I could justify it as a job as opposed to an act that I was doing willingly. ... The money helped me justify it to myself and the money also just helped justify all the physicalities of the job and how strenuous it was. (Paton)

In turn, on days when she did not make a lot of money, it became harder to reason with herself:

If you make money, you don't hate it, but if ... I wasn't making money, I hated myself cos I was like, what the fuck am I doing? [The money] makes it feel like you're doing it for something, not just doing it. That's how I felt. (Paton)

The narratives presented here are reflective of the literature on dirty work in the recognition that understanding the dirt as “work” is what grants it acceptability (Mills & Schejbal, 2007; Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014). Paton's troubles in her relationship with her bisexual partner, which she attributes in part to internalised biphobia, eventually resulted in her decision to leave the sex industry. She spoke insightfully about her interactions with lesbian women who she felt were unable to see her sex work as independent from her emerging lesbian identity and, instead, concluded that she must remain a bisexual woman because of her sexualised work with men. Paton described being viewed as a “fence sitter” and her irritation with both partners and other community members who suggested that she was at once attracted to the male clients but also to her sex industry peers, both creating disharmony in her relationships: “Gold star lesbians, I didn't get much respect from. Which is weird. ... I did meet a couple that had never slept with a man before and they almost looked at me like I was disgusting” (Paton).

The term “gold star” refers to a woman who is lesbian-identified and has never had sexual contact with a male (Wapenyi, 2010). I am arguing here that whorephobia, from within the queer and lesbian communities, occurs due to the “dirty work” nature of sex work, but also because of the way it complicates typical understandings of sexuality. As queer communities' understandings of sexuality progress, this second reason becomes less salient and, in fact, sex work can *add* to an individual's queer cultural capital, as in the narratives earlier in this chapter. Morris (2017) found with gay capital that being homosexual within school spaces traditionally has meant less cultural capital but, in contemporary Britain, the opposite can be said. I propose that, similarly, being a sex worker in and before the early 2000s negatively impacted on queer cultural capital, whereas with

the rise of internet culture, identity politics, and the subsequent “oppression Olympics” (Hancock, 2011), the opposite can be true. To conclude, understandings of sexuality are temporal and geographically specific, as is the boundary policing that occurs within queer communities.

Conclusion

This final discussion chapter focused on the community aspect of the research question. It sought to understand how sex work impacts the ways in which queer women engage with and experience their communities, both the queer community and the sex worker community. I have demonstrated the significance of Community Whore Capital (CWC) as a form of currency within contemporary Western queer and leftist communities, and its distribution within an inversion of the traditionally identified whorearchy.

Whilst Chapter Five looked at individual practices of identity, and Chapter Six focused on the embodied experience, this chapter concludes the discussion section of this thesis by considering how lesbian sex workers are aided or restricted from full participation in the fields in which they exist due to the capital they acquire from their sex worker status.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter will conclude the thesis by reflecting on the research question and summarising the answers to that question. After summarising the key themes and arguments of this thesis, I will consider the importance of this research project and its contribution to the literature. I begin by addressing the limitations and challenges of the project before suggesting future opportunities of enquiry.

Thesis Summary

Following the introductory chapter that explained my positionality as a peer researcher, in Chapter Two, I explored the question of whether sex work is inherently queer through an examination of the existing literature, this providing the basis for my study. I situated this research in the context of the historically shifting construction of sex workers as psychically unwell and criminal, to workers deserving of rights. In arguing that sex work is work and sex workers are, therefore, workers, I unpacked contemporary feminist debates in which sex workers are positioned as either victims of the patriarchy or working women monetising their subordinate position in society. I also outlined what is currently known about the identity practices of sex workers, particularly in relation to the management of stigma, and linked these to current theories of dirty work. This was followed by an overview of the intersections of queer and lesbian identities and sex workers, with a particular focus on the historical and contemporary relationships between these two communities. Finally, I outlined the existing research on women who identify as non-heterosexual and provide heterosexual sexual services, establishing this as a significant gap in the literature, and acknowledged the important contributions of peer researchers in this field. Overall, this chapter argued that, while research on sex worker identity has been of growing interest to scholars in contemporary times, this has largely focused on heterosexual workers, thus overlooking the complexities associated with non-heterosexual sexuality as well as the implications for sex workers' engagement with broader communities, and the queer community, in particular.

In Chapter Three, I outlined the methodological grounding for this project consisting of a phenomenological approach that positions researcher and subject as co-constructors of knowledge. I argued for the importance of peer research due to the stigmatised nature of the sex industry and the subject population who are both difficult to access and experiencing research

fatigue. I examined queer theory and made the case for a Bourdisean approach that expanded on his framework of habitus, field, and capital, following examples set by authors such as Green (2008), Huppatz (2012), and Morris (2017). My decision to use a non-representative sample, unstructured interviews, and a visual research method, as discussed in Chapter Three, was grounded in my phenomenological approach. Attention to ethical considerations and practices, also explored here, provided a solid foundation for this work. In the remainder of the chapter, I outlined the practical workings – the methods – of the project.

Chapter Four summarised the key findings of the study. Capsule biographies of the twenty participants provided a nuanced understanding of them as people, complementing the demographic data provided in Table One. These capsule biographies were included to give the reader an opportunity to *get a feel* for each participant, their outlook, situation, and essence. This was followed by a discussion of the sample and its representativeness of the sex work community. I argued that the lack of street or survival sex workers, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, and transgender women was predictable given my own identity as a cisgender, white, and working- to middle-class researcher. The sample group was also relatively homogenous in age, class, and English language proficiency, which likely reflected the use of snowball sampling and social media advertising as the methods of recruitment. I followed this with a mapping of theoretical works as a context for my research findings. For example, I discussed Morris's (2017) extension of Bourdieu's (1972/1977) theory of practice to include gay capital as a form of cultural capital; Hakim's (2010) notion of erotic capital; and Green's (2008) erotic habitus. Using this as foundation, I proposed two forms of capital that are distinct to sex workers: namely, Intra Industry Whore Capital (IIWC) and Community Whore Capital CWC. IIWC is the capital, accrued by sex workers whose habitus has expertly understood the rules of the game of commercial sex, that is readily converted into financial capital. I have argued that IIWC is especially significant for lesbian and queer sex workers due to their "deviant" sexuality which grants them an outsider perspective on performance of the heterosexual woman. CWC, which I see as similar to Morris's (2017) gay capital – or "street cred" – is also important for lesbian and queer sex workers who may enjoy further benefit than heterosexual sex workers given their proximity to contemporary queer communities which employ leftist and progressive values and identity politics.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven discussed the key findings of this study, with each chapter reflecting one of three distinct, but interconnected, themes. In Chapter Five, I focused on the participants' identity practices as these related to the theme of identity work more broadly. A detailed

exploration of participant narratives was positioned within Bourdieu's framework, notably for this chapter, that of Bourdieu's habitus:

Why did I revive that old word? Because with the notion of habitus you can refer to something that is close to what is suggested by the idea of habit, while differing from it in one important respect. The habitus, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions. So the term constantly reminds us that it refers to something historical, linked to individual history, and that it belongs to a genetic mode of thought, as opposed to essentialist modes of thought (like the notion of competence which is part of the Chomskian lexis). Moreover, by habitus the Scholastics also meant something like a property, a capital. And indeed, the habitus is a capital, but one which, because it is embodied, appears as innate. (Bourdieu, 1981/1993)

Here, I illustrated the reflexive nature of identity work for lesbian and queer sex workers, highlighting the implications of their social positioning as sexual deviants. These included an acute awareness of normative ideals of "woman" which proved to be an asset for understanding their role in sex work, and the ways in which this mirrored and disrupted sexual roles in contemporary society. In managing their identities within and across conflicting fields of practice, participants incorporated a separation of self into their skillset. I ended this chapter by outlining the effects of sex work on participants' personal sexual identities as well as the ramifications of stigma, relating these experiences to Bourdieu's (1984) understanding of class.

The body was my primary focus in Chapter Six. Bourdieu's habitus provided a sound framework to understand the embodied experience, as echoed by Skeggs:

The body experienced is always a social body made up of meanings and values, gestures, postures, physical bearing, speech and language. It is through the body that the child learns intimately to experience wider structural features, which are never just an experience of the structural but always entwined with the child's physical and sexual presence, with its bodily relation to others. This is a dialectical process involving objectification in which some features become objectified over time and form the habitus. (Skeggs, 2004b, p. 21).

In this chapter, I explored the place of bodily practices in participants' narratives, with a focus on the question of how the body moves through the fields of sex work and queerness. Practices of separation were prominent in most narratives; for example, in the choice not to use particular bodily adornments (such as lingerie) in their personal sex lives. Participants talked about the discipline required to achieve a valid performance of woman, and the ways in which this performance was troubled by queerness and, for some, by fatness. Women working in the sex industry also belonged to communities of diverse sexuality and employed practices to signal their queerness to others. This meant walking a fine line between the performance of woman necessary to gain financial capital in the field of the sex industry, and the bodily markers of queerness

required to retain cultural capital in the field of queer communities. A brief discussion of racial difference and racism concluded the chapter, further highlighting the ways in which embodied realities limit the habitus in its movement across fields.

Chapter Seven concluded this section of the thesis with a discussion of participants' navigation of communities, beginning with the sex worker communities and followed by the queer communities. Drawing from participant narratives, I argued that CWC, the second form of whore capital, determined the ease with which participants navigated each field. I offered an inverted model of the traditional "whorearchy", arguing that, in the current climate of popular cultural understandings of intersectionality, identities that typically hold the most oppression also hold the most capital in the highly politicised realms of the sex work and queer communities. Participant narratives showed the temporal nature of this capital, as well as the ways in which certain identities have become more valued over time.

Key Findings

The aim of this research was to understand how lesbian and queer women negotiate their identities as both sex workers, and women existing in queer and lesbian communities. I set out to explore how these women navigate their identities in seemingly contradictory spaces of performing heterosexual sexuality and living as non-heterosexual. I conducted interviews with twenty women who self-identified as both sex workers and women who did not to have sexual or romantic relationships with men. The interviews generated extensive and rich data, which I analysed by applying a Bourdesian lens, observing that lesbian and queer sex workers negotiate their communities with a higher level of conscious identity work than other people. Using Bourdieu's (1972/1977) theory of practice as a structure, I argued that the consciousness of this identity work can be understood as two forms of cultural capital, which I have defined as discrete types of whore capital. This capital exists in the fields of the sex industry (IWC) and queer communities (CWC). Data from this study clearly illustrate that participants had reflexively developed their sense of self in relation to both their sexuality and their position as women in a heteronormative world. I argue that, in this context, their deviance from normative sexuality enables them to consciously develop their understanding of positionality which, in turn, provides them with an enhanced grip on the "rules of the game" of sex work. During the interviews, participants showed a high level of reflexivity about their position within social structures. Refuting Skeggs' (2004b) claims that reflexivity in contemporary times is a luxury available only to

the privileged. I argue that reflexivity, as a part of habitus, is an integral skill that enables these women to participate in conflicting fields of practice.

Contribution to knowledge

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge concerning experiences of identity for contemporary queer women. It does so by highlighting the performative nature of gender, particularly that of “woman”, and the continued pervasiveness of gender norms despite the achievements of second wave feminism. Critical analysis of existing scholarly work on identity practices was used to situate and contextualise my findings, furthering this important area of knowledge. Researching experiences in the sex industry provides unique insights into the field of male desire – where a financial transaction occurs, and within the discretion of the brothel space, men can more honestly express their desires of the women they interact with.

This study has addressed the absence of lesbians from research about the sex industry by drawing attention to the existence of queer female sexuality in this context. My findings provide evidence to support the largely anecdotal accounts of sex work as an integral part of lesbian work opportunities. I argue that the mere existence of this study validates those participants who have otherwise lacked the opportunity to speak with another lesbian sex worker about their experiences. The findings of this study contribute to practitioners’ and researchers’ understandings of nuanced sexuality in their work with sex workers, providing a counter to the assumption of heterosexuality, and recognition of the significant negative effects of heteronormativity for queer people (Dean et al., 2016).

This study has also demonstrated the usefulness of Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) theory of practice, and, in particular, the concepts of field and habitus, for understanding the complex experiences and identities of sex workers. Just as Hakim (2011) furthered Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) theory of capital by introducing the concept of erotic capital, and Morris (2017) argued for the existence of gay capital, I have demonstrated that particular forms of capital exist in particular fields for the particular habitus of queer women sex workers. While Hakim’s (2011) conceptualisation, in particular, has come under fire for “glossing over the structures of race, class and age that mediate women’s access to the resource” (A. Green, 2013, p. 137), I have taken a different approach, grounded in the theory of intersectionality. I do not argue that inter industry whore capital and community whore capital exist for every sex worker or across every field but, instead, that they exist in specific fields and habitus, as shown in this study.

The use of the paper dolls collage activity as a visual research method is unique and provides a template for future identity research with marginalised populations. While visual methods such as photovoice have become well known, they carry greater risks to anonymity. Building on the work of Gauntlett (2007), who used Lego scenes as identity metaphors, and feminist approaches to art therapy (Hogan, 1997), the paper dolls activity “busied the hands” of my participants and injected fun and silliness to facilitate – and provide a focus for – our interactions. The completed paper dolls, paired with relevant participant quotes, were subsequently exhibited in my own nightclub in the Adelaide CBD as part of South Australia’s queer arts and community festival, Feast Festival, in 2021, giving participants and community members a chance to bridge the gap of understanding between them. Some visitors to the exhibition took the time to approach me and thank me for facilitating the work, expressing the ways it had changed their opinions or opened their eyes to the realities of sex work in South Australia where it remains criminalised. Staff and board members of SIN (Sex Industry Network) also attended.

Over the six years that this thesis has been in progress, there has been an emergence in Australia of queer sex workers telling their own stories – from an academic lens, *Queer Sex Work* (Laing et al., 2015); to the autobiographical, *Nothing But My Body* (Lawless, 2021), *Come: A memoir* (Therese, 2020), and *Happy Endings* (B. Green, 2021). These works reveal the important relationship between queer communities and sex workers. It is my hope that this research goes some way to fill the gap in scholarly literature.

Limitations and challenges

In this section, I outline the challenges that presented during this research project and the limitations of this study. Given that the recruitment and interview stage of this study took place from late 2019 until mid-2020, it is perhaps not surprising that the COVID-19 pandemic, with its restrictions to movement and in-person work, presented the largest challenge to this study. After having to cancel a block of interviews scheduled to take place in Melbourne, I made the decision to move the remaining interviews to an online format. By the time the necessary amendments to my ethics application were approved, I was already well behind schedule for data collection. In addition, not all participants responded to my attempts to reschedule their interviews, meaning that further recruitment was required.

The pandemic has had incredible effects on sex workers in Australia and globally. Anecdotally, I have been told that brothels and massage parlours were some of the first businesses to incur fines

for contravening the emergency public health orders in South Australia. It has been said that “illegal” brothels in Melbourne were similarly targeted, and many brothels and strip clubs were temporarily closed (Silva, 2020). Aside from this obvious strain on the lives of sex workers, as rates of joblessness rose and the general public found themselves housebound, many turned to user-generated sites like *OnlyFans* to supplement their income. This made the already flooded market of online pornography even harder for people who had previously relied on sex work to pay their bills. While there are reports of sex workers banding together to raise money and support each other (Diamond, 2020), evidencing the tight knit communities featured in my research, this was a stressful and uncertain time for sex workers, making recruitment all the more challenging.

While the online interviews were challenging in their own right, as discussed in Chapter Four, they also had some benefits, most notably in enabling access to participants who did not live in either Adelaide or Melbourne. Despite this, the small and relatively homogenous nature of the final sample was not representative of the lesbian and queer sex work community in contemporary Australia and, thus, must be considered a key limitation of this study. This is, in part, a result of the snowball sampling method used that, while crucial because of the tight knit and research wary sex worker population, meant that around half of the sample knew – or knew of – at least one other participant. Similarly, the other recruitment method, being online marketing and use of the Scarlett Alliance email distribution list, required that participants had both access to the internet and at least some connection to the online sex worker community. Evidencing this homogeneity, none of the participants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and all were under forty years of age. Only one participant, also the only MTF transgender participant, had done street or survival sex work.

A key implication of the relative homogeneity of this sample is that it cannot be ascertained whether the experiences of reflexive identity reported here reflect those of sex workers outside of this sample. This study did not, however, aim to be representative, but rather to understand the depth and richness of these women’s experiences, providing insight into their identity practices.

A second limitation of this project, also reflective of the small and connected nature of the queer sex worker community, was the necessity to omit or censor some data to protect anonymity. Although participants were aware, and reminded, of risks to their anonymity throughout the interview process, there were still certain details or discussions that I felt needed to be omitted. Knowing that I hope to distribute this research back to the community, it was clear that some

participants would be identifiable if their transcripts were left intact. I also decided to omit locations of most participants outside of the Adelaide and Melbourne regions for the same reason. It, therefore, follows that I cannot draw conclusions about cultural differences across other geographical locations.

Another limitation of this study is the temporal nature of data collection. As previously discussed, the sex industry, and the experiences of queer people, is in a constant state of flux impacted by changing laws. Since commencing work on this thesis, several key events have occurred. Including the Australian marriage equality campaign and legislation of same-sex marriage, ever evolving digital technologies (Sanders et al., 2018), the introduction of SESTA/FOSTA laws (Blunt & Wolf, 2020) as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the decriminalisation of sex work in Victoria (Rollason, 2022). These factors, combined with shifting global politics, have had tangible and intangible effects on the ways in which queer sex workers navigate community, make a living, and relate to broader society. The experiences captured in this thesis, thus, specifically reflect the period between 2019 and 2020 and must be understood within that context.

Recommendations for future work

Queer sex work is both a quickly evolving community and, as an area of research, a rapidly evolving academic field. The US based internet censorship laws, colloquially known as SESTA/FOSTA, have impacted on sex worker online connection (Blunt & Wolf, 2020), while the global COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the population of sex workers, with some leaving the industry for more stable jobs and others entering it due to job losses. Online platforms, such as *OnlyFans*, normalise the existence of sexual commerce while, at the same time, contributing to sex worker oppression through the de-platforming and banning of workers due to anti-sex work laws (P. Ryan, 2019). As reflected in the emerging literature regarding the explosion of online and user generated sex work platforms (Brewster & Dawkins, 2021; Safaee, 2021; Gowayed et al., 2022; Rodriguez, 2022), these shifts are likely to have implications for the demographics of sex workers, as well as the operation of stigma in their lives (Rodriguez, 2022). I recommend that the particular impacts for women of non-heterosexual orientations be an important focus for future research, as we also see a rise in young people identifying their sexuality as something other than straight (Carman et al., 2020).

In South Australia, the fight for sex workers' rights has continued, with little success, since the late 1970s. It is my hope that the coming years will bring the decriminalisation of sex work as South Australia follows the example set by other Australian states. The changing landscape, as discussed earlier, also offers opportunities for further study. As we barrel towards peak late-stage capitalism involving self-diagnosis and self-definition via social medias, it is likely our reflexivity will increase, and people will have different understandings of their sexual selves in future. According to Madden (2019), while "Generation Z" is the first generation to "formally form identity" (p. 5), these generational differences present opportunities for cross-generational exchange. The formalisation of identity formation, largely prompted by social media, paired with a sex work landscape impacted by both the COVID-19 online situation, and the rise of conservative politics, mean that the experiences of Gen Z individuals who entered sex work in the early 2020s are likely to be enormously different to those of previous generations. At the same time, recent data in the Australia context (Lea et al., 2015) has suggested that, whilst lesbians may feel less of a need for lesbian specific nightlife than in past generations (referred to as "the scene" by the authors), this nightlife still provided a familiar and safe context for socialising and partying for young participants. The authors note a lack of research within the Australian context on engagement in queer community and propose that online communities may be replacing "the scene" in the lives of young queer people. Thus, the impact of changing community landscapes (and indeed changing concepts of community itself) is likely to have a profound impact on modes of community engagement for queer people, sex workers, and other marginalised groups, opening gaps for investigation by researchers.

Another recommendation for future work relates to people who sit outside of the gender binary. Throughout this project, I have been approached by, and witnessed, many non-binary people working in the sex industry. As our understandings of gender identity and gender fluidity change, there is an opportunity for research focusing on the people who transcend the binary. While my work looked at the way that *women* performed heterosexuality (and, I would argue, a gendered heterosexuality), there is a significant gap in understanding how non-binary people perform as "cisgendered woman" in the context of a sex work market that remains largely binary in its understandings of workers and clients. In a similar vein, the gendered experiences of straight transgender women who sell sexual services, particularly the ways in which gendered embodiment affects their experience and/or affirms their identities throughout their process of physically affirming their gender, could also offer fascinating insight. It is also the case that straight

women's negotiation of gendered performances in sex work remains under researched. Other questions of interest include: How do straight women understand the sexuality of their queer colleagues? Do they also sense that they are performing "woman" in a conscious way? How does this affect their gender identity, and their heterosexual relationships, outside of their working lives?

The visual methodology used in this project offers significant potential for researchers interested in perceptions and experiences of identity. As shown here, visual data provide a great vehicle for verbal data collection, and could be examined in future studies to yield an even richer understanding of participant positionality. Further, subsequent exhibitions and showings of pieces developed through visual methods, such as those used in this study, could collect data from exhibition visitors to explore whether, for example, their views have changed or been challenged. The possibilities for the furthering of visual methods are almost endless!

Closing summary

This final chapter has synthesised the findings of the thesis project, identified its contributions to the field, and presented opportunities for future research. Overall, the key finding of this project is that lesbian and queer sex workers possess highly developed reflexivity due to their positions of deviancy. This reflexivity enables them to excel at the "rules of the game" of the sex work industry. In leftist queer communities, an emerging capital is possessed by sex workers where, instead of being derided and stigmatised, this identity is now, at times, revered. I have argued that two forms of whore capital – Intra Industry Whore Capital and Community Whore Capital – are particularly significant assets for, and tools used by, the lesbian and queer sex worker habitus. It is hoped that this study contributes to recognition of the existence of lesbian and queer sex workers in the literature.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Conditional ethical approval

CONDITIONAL APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.:	8448
Project Title:	Lesbian and Queer Sex Workers: formation of identity and experience of community(s)
Principal Researcher:	Ms Kate Toone
Email:	toon0009@flinders.edu.au

The Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee is satisfied that in most respects the above project meets the requirements of the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2007-Updated 2018\)](#). However, some further clarification is needed before final ethics approval can be granted and before data collection can commence.

The project has been given **conditional approval** subject to response to the following comments.

Ethical Considerations

1. Management of Burdens and Risks (F2/F3 and D10)

The Committee views this project as a valuable piece of research to be undertaken with a marginalised participant group. However, to ensure that the utmost protection is in place for both participants and the researcher, the Committee advises that further consideration needs to be given to the management of potential burdens and/or risks listed below.

- Identification as a 'peer' researcher;
- Age of participants; and
- Recruitment and data collection locations.

a) Identification as a 'Peer' Researcher

The Committee noted that documentation to be given to potential participants included advice the student is a 'peer' researcher; and the application indicates the researcher is a visible member of the sex work community. Although the Committee does not know in what capacity the student researcher works in the industry, information provided suggests the researcher has links with brothels, and other businesses associated with sex work, in Adelaide.

The Committee appreciates that to recruit women from this marginalised population, identification as a 'peer' researcher would indeed help build rapport and trust; particularly in Adelaide where the researcher is a visible member of the sex work community. However, the Committee advises that identification of the student in this way brings risks for both the researcher and the University (i.e. reputational risk; safety risks; legal risks; insurance coverage exclusions).

On that basis, the Committee asks that all references to the student being a 'peer' researcher be removed from all documentation to be given to potential participants ([see sections 4.6.5 to 4.6.7 under 'People who may be involved in illegal activities' in the National Statement on Ethical](#)

[Conduct in Human Research \(2007 – Updated 2018\)](#). Please submit the revised versions of all participant documentation for review.

b) Age of Participants

D1d indicates that participants will be aged 17-years and above, however, C5 states participants will be 18 and above. Flinders University cannot condone or endorse the recruitment of minors involved in sex work and associated illegal activities. In addition, as the researcher is a mandated reporter, from a legal perspective; recruitment of a minor could place a participant at risk; as well as the researcher if knowledge of a minor involved in sex work is not reported to relevant authorities. On that basis, please (1) confirm that no participants under the age of 18 will be recruited; and (2) outline what processes will put in place to ensure no-one under the age of 18 is recruited.

Please also revise the Letter of Introduction, Information Sheet and Consent Form to include clear advice that participants must be 18 years old or over to be eligible to participate. Please submit the revised versions of the documents for review.

c) Locations for Recruitment and Data Collection

Proposed locations for recruitment and data collection for this project includes brothels, massage parlours, the private homes of participants, Flinders University city or Bedford Park campus; the Sex Industry Network (SIN) office; and a community space in Melbourne (C5 and D10). The Committee advises the various locations proposed for recruitment and data collection have the potential to give rise to risks for participants, the researcher, and consequently the University for reasons that include:

31. Potential Admission of Criminal Conduct

Sex workers choosing to participate in the research project in-person has the potential to be viewed by relevant authorities as an admission of criminal conduct.

ii. Researcher's Visibility in the Sex Worker Community

The researchers visibility in the sex worker community in Adelaide could equate to the student being known by police, which could place the researcher at greater risk when present at the locations listed above if authorities were to attend the premises.

The Committee advises well-defined procedures need to be established and in place to make it clear to all present (including law enforcement) when the researcher is attending locations, for the purposes of conducting the research, versus other reasons. Please consider and provide a detailed explanation of the procedures to be put in place.

iii. Safety Concerns

There are risks of physical and sexual violence occurring at brothels, other sex work businesses, or other locations frequented by sex workers which equates to safety concerns for the researcher. The Committee also holds concern that these risks would also be present if the researcher attends homes of the sex workers, on the basis that there is potential for some women to work from home.

On the basis that the safety of the researcher is paramount, the Committee asks that the student researcher and supervisor carry out and provide a detailed risk assessment which includes an outline of the safety protocols to be put in place.

2. Recruitment and Conflict of Interest (D4a, D4b, D4c, D4d, D5 and D6)

Please provide additional information by responding to the following comments:

31) Conflict of Interest – 3rd Researcher / Supervisor (D4a)

Please clarify whether the 3rd researcher / supervisor will be involved in the recruitment of participants; and if any potential conflict of interest may exist. If yes to both, please clarify how participants will be recruited in a way that will minimise possible perceptions of obligation and/or pressure to participate ([see Chapter 5.4: 'Conflicts of Interest' in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#)).

b) Recruitment Verbal Script (D4c)

The response to D4c indicates that the researcher will attend workplaces and read the information contained on the Information Sheet. Given that the Information Sheet will then be left with the workers to distribute amongst themselves; the Committee asks that a more realistic verbal script be provided that includes a summary to the workers about why the researcher is there, what the project involves, time commitment, how their anonymity and confidentiality will be protected (i.e. via verbal consent process) etc.

c) Recruitment Email Text (D4d)

D4d only provides as short paragraph, which appears to be written from the Service Providers perspective. Please revise the email text by deleting the reference to Kate being a peer researcher and submit the revised version for review.

d) Information given to Potential Participants (D5)

The Committee agrees that the proposed plan to obtain verbal consent is appropriate for this participant group; however, asks that a Consent Form still be provided to potential participants for viewing only. The provision of the Consent Form to potential participants is suggested by the Committee purely to enable women to follow the terms of the consent themselves by reading it; even if the researcher also intends to read the terms to potential participants.

Please submit a Consent Form for interviews; and a Consent Form for the paper-doll exercise, ensuring they are based on the templates available from the [Guidelines, Forms and Templates](#) webpage.

Please also confirm that the Consent Forms will be (i) emailed to potential participants, along with the Letter of Introduction and Information Sheet by the service provider; and (ii) given to participants in hard-copy at the time verbal consent is obtained. After verbal consent has been obtained, the women can then choose to hand back the hard-copy Consent Forms if they wish.

31. Anonymity (D7)

Although the researcher will take measures to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants; D7 explains that anonymity cannot be guaranteed as other women may be present when someone indicates interest in participating; or members of the lesbian and queer community may be able to work out who participated. The Committee advises that without the guarantee of anonymity, potential burdens and/risk for participants are magnified. Please consider and provide comment.

To ensure informed consent can be obtained, the Committee advises that the Letter of Introduction, Information Sheet and Consent Form need to be revised to make it clear that while no identifying information will be published, other sex workers and other people present in those locations are likely to know who is participating. Please submit the revised versions of the documents for review.

2. Participant Reimbursement and Funding (F7 and G2)

The response to item F7 indicates that participants will be given \$80 cash for approximately 1.5 hours

of their time; however the Committee noted that G2 stated that no funding is associated with this research project. Please clarify how participant reimbursements will be funded.

31. Facebook Post Script (Attachment)

Please revise the Facebook recruitment advertisement text by deleting the reference about the student being a 'peer' researcher; and submit it for review

31. Recruitment Poster (Attachment)

Please revise the recruitment poster by changing dot point 3 to read '*Are you 18 and over and fluent in English?*', and deleting the reference to the student as a 'peer researcher'. Please submit the revised version for review.

31. Letter of Introduction (Attachment)

Please revise the Letter of Introduction by ensuring it is based on the SBREC template (including all headers and logos) available from the [Guidelines, Forms and Templates](#) webpage. Please submit the revised document for review.

6. Information Sheet (Attachment)

To ensure informed consent can be obtained, please revise the Information Sheet by including advice that, although no identifying information will be published, and information will be treated with the strictest confidence, that information collected will not be safe from lawful search or seizure. Please submit the revised version for review.

7. Verbal Consent Script

To ensure informed consent can be obtained, please revise the verbal consent script by including advice that, although no identifying information will be published, and information will be treated with the strictest confidence, that information collected will not be safe from lawful search or seizure. Please submit the revised version for review.

8. Interview Questions

The Committee noted that a lot of the interview questions appears to be 'closed' questions which would elicit a 'yes' or 'no' responses. The Committee suggested that the researcher may wish to rethink the presentation of some of the questions to be asked to open up the dialogue more. If any changes are made to the interview questions, please submit them for review.

Additional Comments (no response required)

Audio Recordings (items C4 and C5)

If a smart phone will be used to record interviews and/or focus groups, to protect the anonymity and/or confidentiality of participants, the committee advises that the smart phone must be password protected. Please also ensure that the audio recordings are securely transferred to a password protected Flinders University computer as soon as is practicable.

Appendix B: Modification approval (COVID-19 adjustments)

MODIFICATION (No.1) APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.: **8448**

Project Title: Lesbian and Queer Sex Workers: formation of identity and experience of community(s)

Principal Researcher: Ms Kate Toone

Email: toon0009@flinders.edu.au

Modification Approval Date: 30 March 2020

Ethics Approval Expiry Date: **31 December 2025**

I am pleased to inform you that the modification request submitted for project 8448 on the 25 March 2020 has been reviewed and approved by the Chairperson of the Committee. A summary of the approved modifications are listed below. Any additional information that may be required from you will be listed in the second table shown below called 'Additional Information Required'.

Approved Modifications	
Extension of ethics approval expiry date	
Project title change	
Personnel change	
Research objectives change	
Research method change	x
Participants – addition +/- change	x
Consent process change	
Recruitment process change	
Research tools change	x
Document / Information Changes	
<u>Other</u> – Method of Payment	x

Additional Information Required

None.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS

31. Participant Documentation

Please note that it is the responsibility of researchers and supervisors, in the case of student projects, to ensure that:

- all participant documents are checked for spelling, grammatical, numbering and formatting errors. The Committee does not accept any responsibility for the above mentioned errors.
- the Flinders University logo is included on all participant documentation (e.g., letters of Introduction, information Sheets, consent forms, debriefing information and questionnaires – with the exception of purchased research tools) and the current Flinders University letterhead is included in the header of all letters of introduction. The Flinders University international logo/letterhead should be used and documentation should contain international dialling codes for all telephone and fax numbers listed for all research to be conducted overseas.
- the SBREC contact details, listed below, are included in the footer of all letters of introduction and information sheets.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 'INSERT PROJECT No. here following approval'). For more information regarding ethics approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

2. Annual Progress / Final Reports

In order to comply with the monitoring requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (updated 2018)*; please be reminded that; an annual progress report must be submitted each year on the **22 October** (approval anniversary date) for the duration of the ethics approval using the report template available from the [Managing Your Ethics Approval](#) web page.

Please note that no data collection can be undertaken after the ethics approval expiry date listed at the top of this notice. If data is collected after expiry, it will not be covered in terms of ethics. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that annual progress reports are submitted on time; and that no data is collected after ethics has expired.

If the project is completed *before* ethics approval has expired please ensure a final report is submitted immediately. If ethics approval for your project expires please either submit (1) a final report; or (2) an extension of time request (using the modification request form).

Next Report Due Date:

22 October 2020

Final Report Due Date:

31 December 2025

Student Projects

For student projects, the SBREC recommends that current ethics approval is maintained until a student's thesis has been submitted, assessed and finalised. This is to protect the student in the event that reviewers recommend that additional data be collected from participants.

INFORMATION SHEET

for Interviews

Information sheet for sex workers

Researcher(s)

Ms Kate Toone
College of Education, Psychology & Social Work
Flinders University

Supervisor(s)

Dr Priscilla Dunk-West
College of Education, Psychology & Social Work
Flinders University
Tel: 82015288

Dr Kate Seymour
College of Education, Psychology & Social Work
Flinders University
Tel: 82015973

This study is part of the project titled 'Lesbian and Queer Sex Workers: formation of identity and experience of community(s).' This project will investigate 'How do lesbian and queer sex workers in contemporary Australia negotiate their identities and communities as both lesbians/queer, and as women who perform heterosexual sexualities?' This project is supported by Flinders University, College of Education, Psychology & Social Work and the researcher is a peer researcher. You must be 18 or over to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study

This project aims to find out how women (cisgender and transgender) who identify as lesbians and or queer, and work in the sex industry for a male clientele, experience identity and community. Cisgender women are people who were assigned female at birth and who identify as women. Transgender women are people who were assigned as male at birth but who identify as women, regardless of whether they have transitioned medically.

The researcher has chosen to include the term 'queer' as it is an umbrella term used by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community (LGBTI). Some women who only have sexual relationships with other women in their personal lives may not feel able to use the term 'lesbian' because of their sexual contact with men as part of their work, this study aims to include these women. The researcher is specifically looking for women who only have sex and relationships with other women (cis and trans) outside of their work.

What will I be asked to do?

You are invited to attend a one-on-one online interview (Skype/Zoom) with a researcher who will ask you to participate in a craft activity involving 'paper dolls'. To participate, you will need to either print out the 'dolls' yourself OR provide a postal address for the researcher to send you copies. You will need scissors, a glue stick and something to colour the 'dolls' (not provided by the researcher).

You will do the craft activity while the researcher asks you some questions about the impact of your work on your sexual identity formation and the way you have experienced both the sex work and the queer community. Participation is entirely voluntary. The interview will take about 60 minutes (not including the time it takes you to prepare the 'dolls'- printing etc). The

interview will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with reviewing the results. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a computer file.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

During the craft activity you will be asked to dress a paper doll using paper costumes to make your own. You can then put your doll on different paper 'sets' to explain your experiences of identity in different environments.

You will then be given the option to scan, photograph or post your doll to the researcher (postage paid envelope provided). The researcher will then facilitate an exhibition of all of the participants dolls and sets which you will be invited to attend along with any of your family and friends (this may occur in an online format). The researcher hopes that you will have fun, feel understood and be able to share your experiences through participating in this research. You will also be able to access copies of any articles or papers written from the data collected, the links for these will be advertised via the Facebook page.

Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

We will ask you to use a work name or a fake name and your legal identity will be kept anonymous (only recorded if you would like to be paid via direct deposit). Any identifying information will be removed, and your comments will only be linked to your fake/work name. All information and results obtained in this study will be stored in a secure way, with access restricted to relevant researchers. Your postal address (if given to enable postage of the 'doll' activity) will not be recorded anywhere other than in the email you send it in by the researcher.

Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

Other community members may be able to identify your contributions even though they will not be directly attributed to you. The researcher anticipates few risks from your involvement in this study, however, given the nature of the project, some participants could experience emotional discomfort. If any emotional discomfort is experienced, please contact Lifeline on

13 11 14 for crisis support that can be accessed free of charge by all participants or SIN on 83517626 for referrals to other appropriate support services. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher.

The researcher is a mandated reporter, meaning that she is required to report situations that place children at risk of abuse or neglect. Anything else that you disclose to the researcher will be kept confidential and anonymous however the data may not be safe from lawful search or seizure by law enforcement.

How do I agree to participate?

Participation is voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any questions, and you are free to withdraw from the interview and craft activity at any time without effect or consequences. Consent will be asked for verbally and you can change your mind at any time.

Recognition of Contribution / Time / Printing costs

If you would like to participate, in recognition of your contribution and participation time, you will be provided with \$80. This payment can be made either via direct bank transfer (requiring you to give your legal name and bank details to the researcher who will not record it elsewhere) or via a cash app such as Beemit if this is preferred. Payment will be made once verbal consent is given at the beginning of the online interview.

How will I receive feedback?

On project completion, participants will be invited to see the exhibition. Results of publications will be distributed through the research Facebook account.

Where can I go for support if I feel distress?

1800RESPECT- is a 24/7 phone line and online chat service specialising in domestic violence and sexual assault. They can be reached at 1800737732 or at <https://www.1800respect.org.au/>

Qlife is a support service for queer people to talk about sexuality/sex, identity and gender. You can ring the phone line or online chat between 3pm and 12am every day. They can be reached at 1800184527 or <https://qlife.org.au/>

Lifeline is a suicide prevention hotline available 24/7 on 131114 or www.lifeline.org.au

SIN is the South Australian Sex worker network and can be reached at 83517626

Vixen Collective is a peer based sex worker support organisation in Victoria and can be reached on 0414 275 959 for peer support.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee in South Australia (Project number 8448). For queries regarding the ethics approval of this project, or to discuss any concerns or complaints, please contact the Executive Officer of the committee via telephone on +61 8 8201 3116 or email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix D: Recruitment poster



College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

Call for Participants

- Are you a female (cis or trans) sex worker (brothel, massage, private, sugar, dancer or online worker) who also identifies as a lesbian or queer woman?
- Are you 18 or over and fluent in English?
- Would you like to be involved in a study looking at how you negotiate identity and community?
- Does the sound of a craft activity and interview appeal to you?

This study is part of the project titled 'Lesbian and Queer Sex Workers: formation of identity and experience of community(s).' This project will investigate 'How do lesbian and queer sex workers in contemporary Australia negotiate their identities and communities as both lesbians/queer, and as women who perform heterosexual sexualities?' This project is supported by Flinders University, College of Education, Psychology & Social Work and the researcher is a peer researcher. Interviews will be conducted online and take approximately 60 minutes and participants will be reimbursed for their time.

For more information, contact Kate at [@LandQSWworkersresearcher](#) on Facebook or email supervisor Priscilla Dunk-West at Priscilla.dunkwest@flinders.edu.au

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee in South Australia (Project Number 8448). For queries regarding the ethics approval of this project please contact the Executive Officer of the Committee via telephone on +61 8 8201 3116 or email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix E: Interview questions

Interview Questions:

- Do you employ practices to separate your work and home identity (for instance work name, clothing, appearance, mannerisms) and do you feel they are effective, how so?
- Have you experienced whorephobia from the queer/lesbian community?
Homophobia from your peer workers?
- How do you reaffirm your sexual identity as a lesbian? What is your sexual identity?
Has sex work had an impact on this?
- Do you experience dysphoria relating to your gender or sexuality, caused by your work and if so, how do you manage this?
- Do you encounter difficulties within lesbian relationships due to your sex worker status?
- Are there times when your lesbian/queer identity intersects with your work (for instance in doing doubles work with either straight or queer women)? How do you manage that?

Appendix F: Phranc doll set

Phranc

American, b. 1957

Jeanne Córdova paper doll set, ca. 1970s

Digital print on paper, 2019

Jeanne Córdova Papers and Photographs, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries

A musician and visual artist, Phranc was a core member of the punk bands Nervous Gender and Catholic Genesis in the late 1970s and 1980s. Her paper doll set is an homage to the pioneering author and activist Jeanne Córdova, who served as editor and publisher of *The Lesbian Tide* (1971-1980), the first nationally circulated lesbian newspaper in the United States. The outfits in Phranc's doll set include such standard butch attire as a leather jacket and overalls, but also a dress, suggesting that these markers of gender identity are malleable, and can be substituted at will.



Appendix G: Autostraddle doll set



Appendix H: Visual method doll set designs

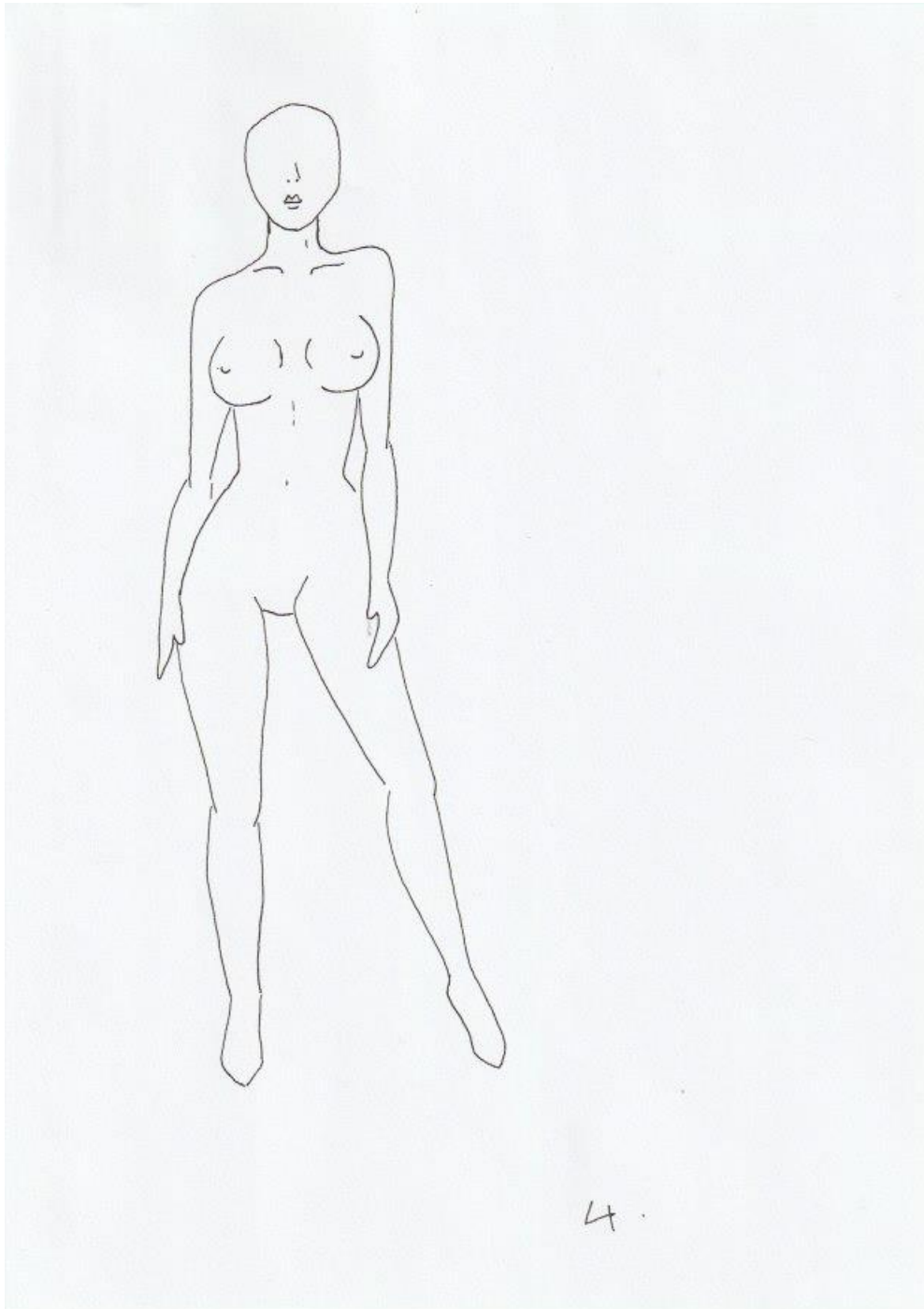


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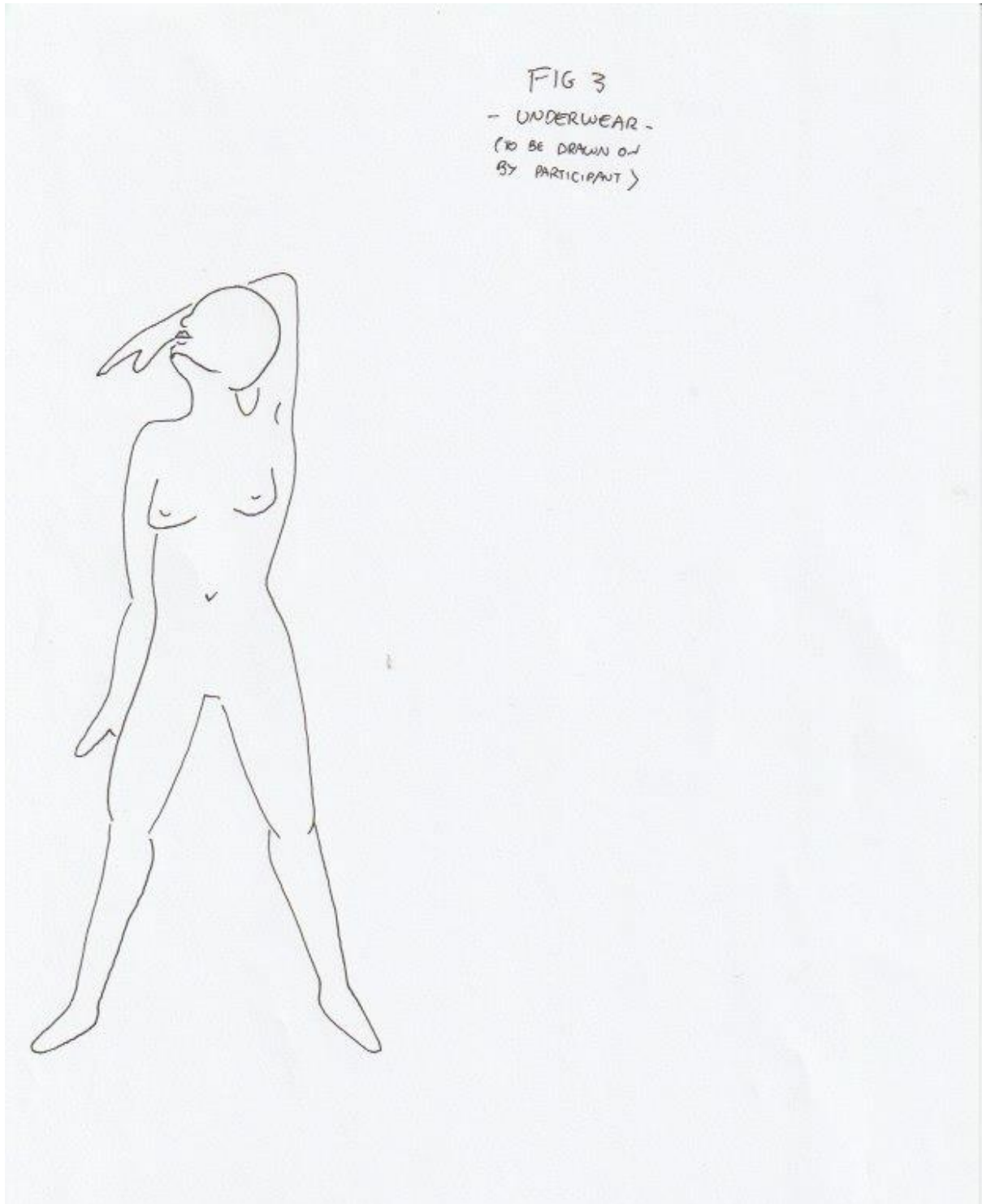


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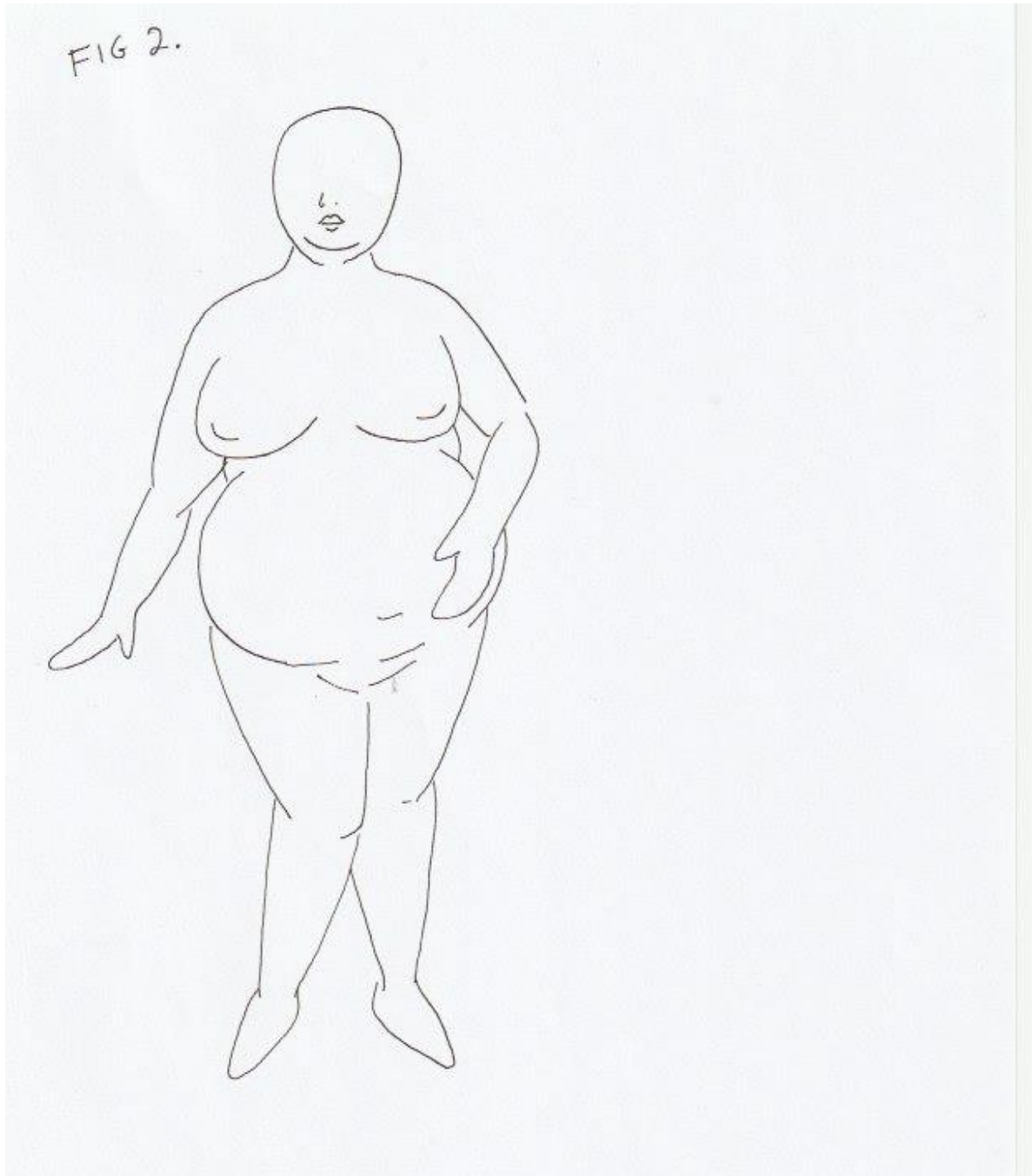


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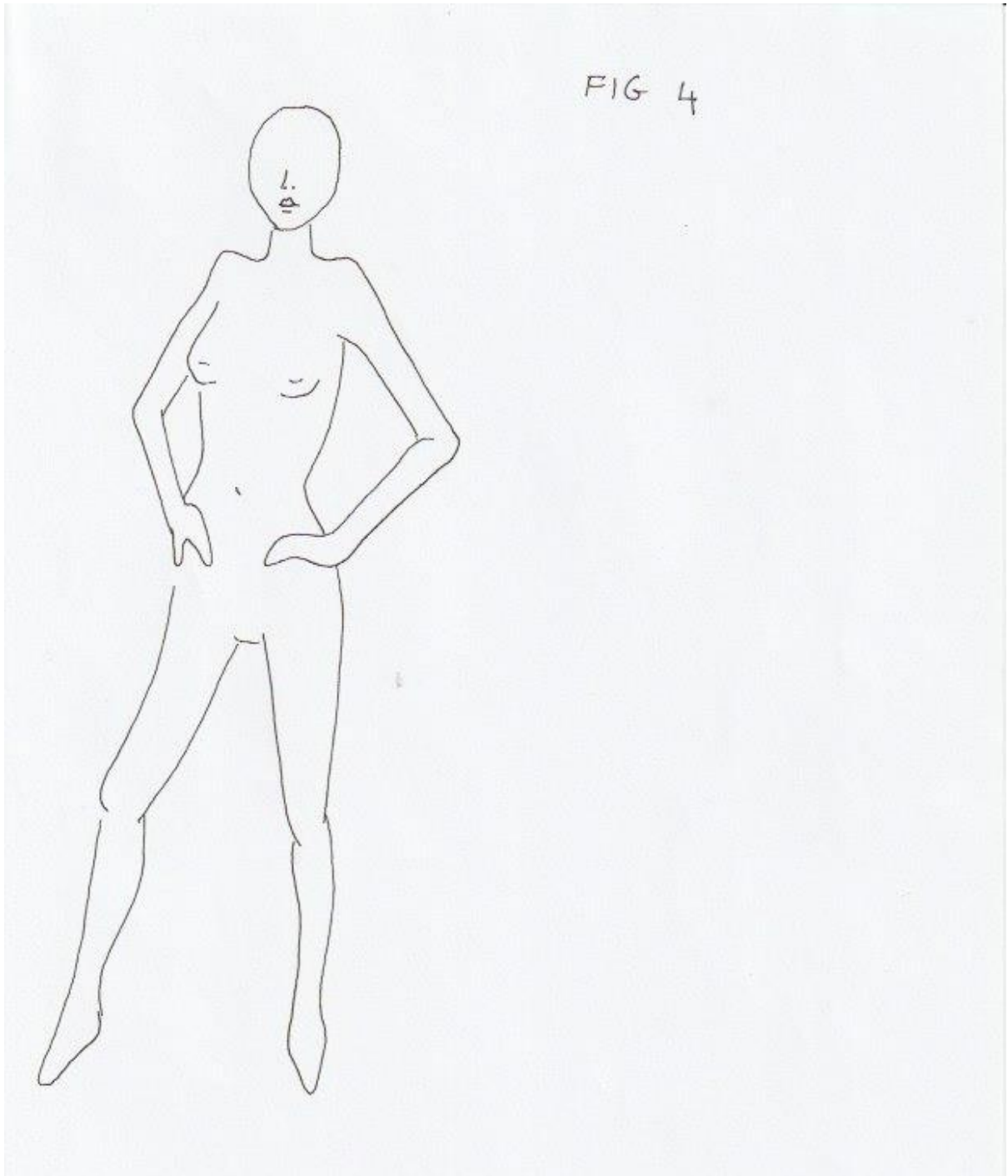


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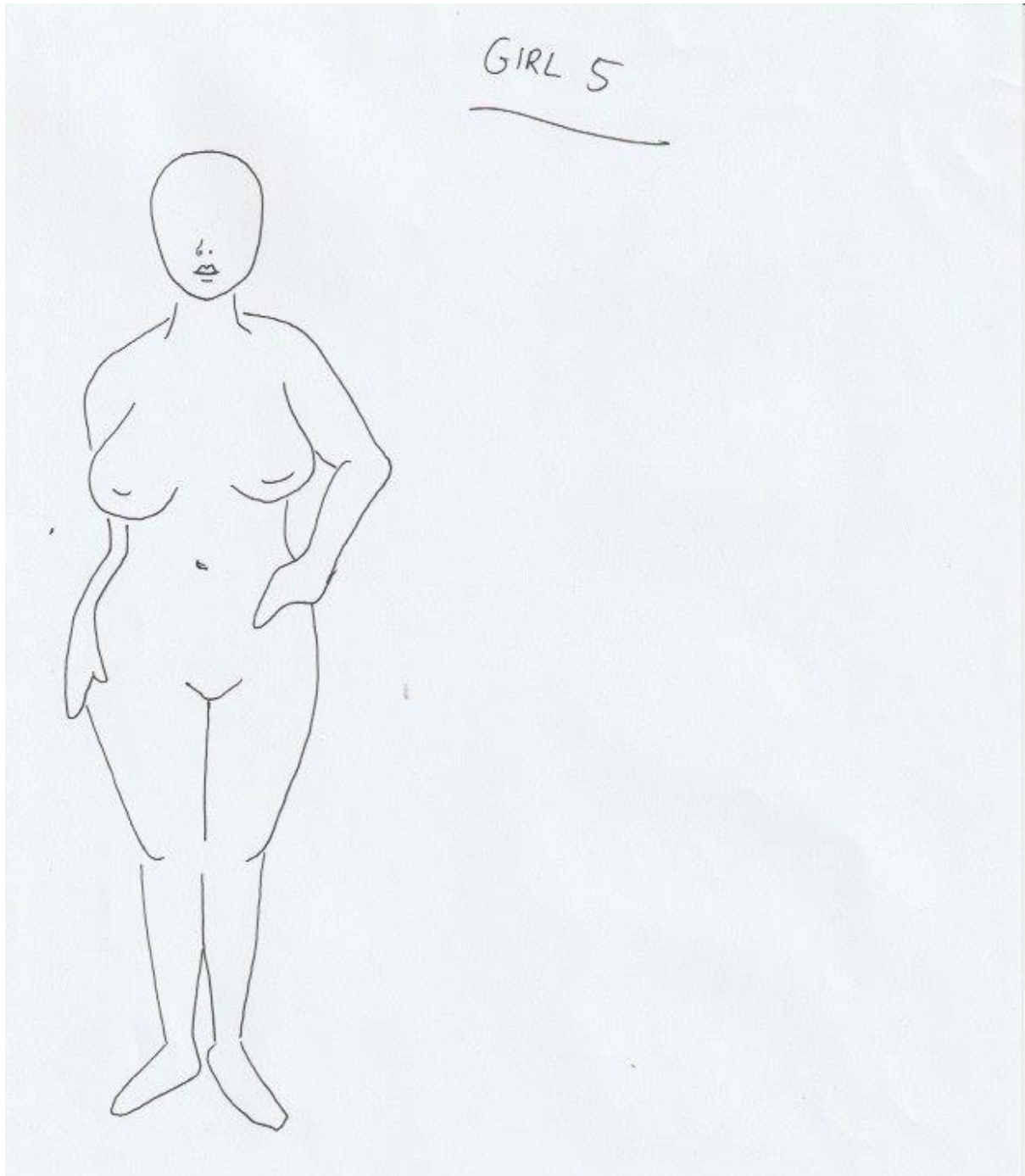


Image 5
Body template

1

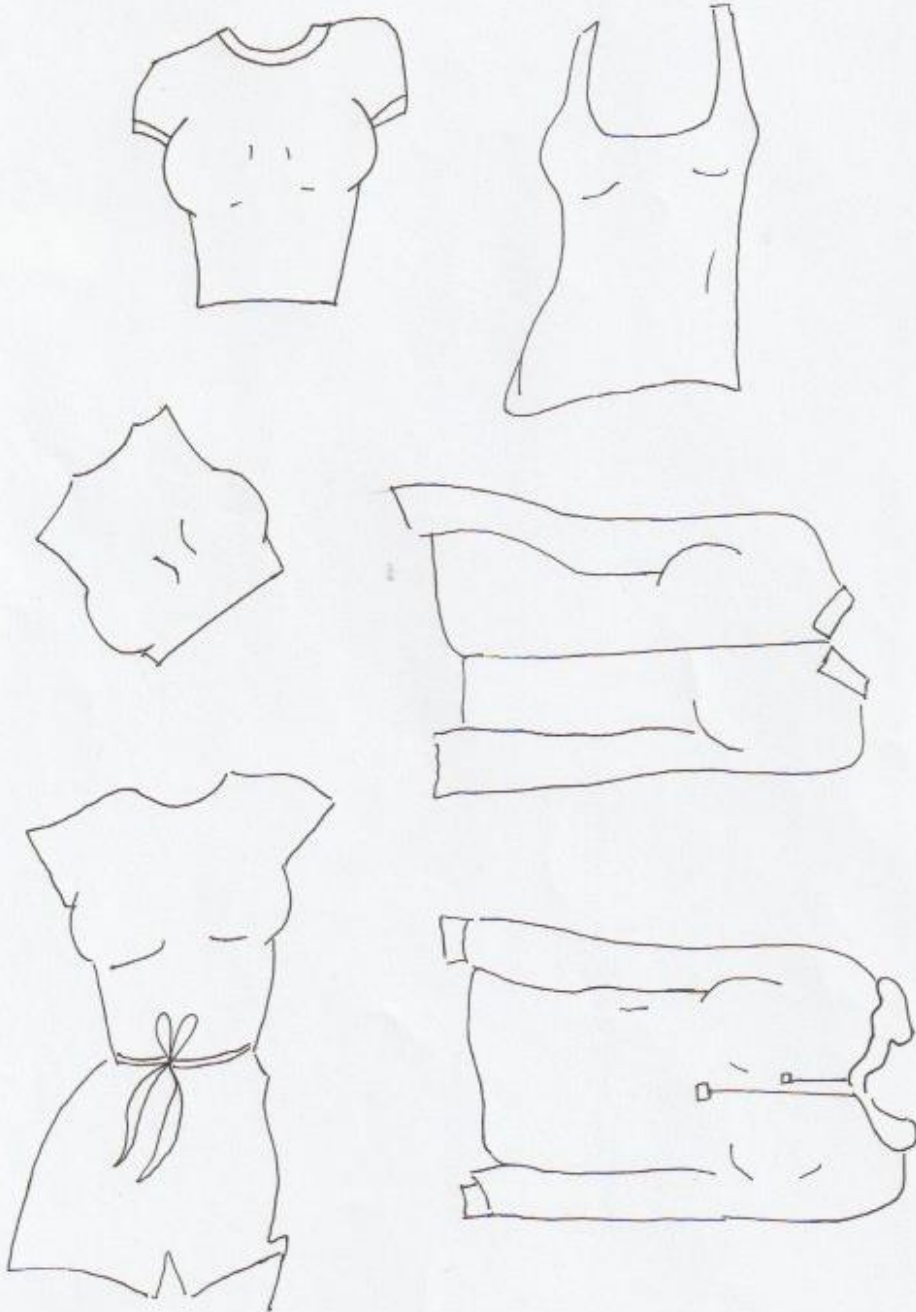


Image 6
Clothing

~~11~~ - UNDERWEAR 1.

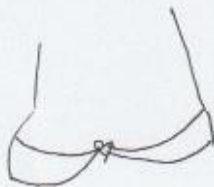
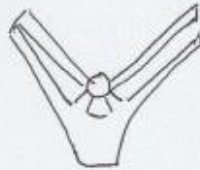
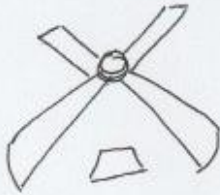
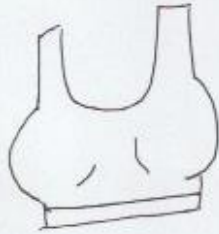
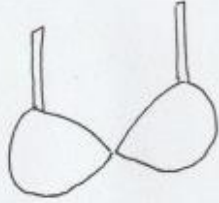


Image 7
Clothing



Image 8
Clothing

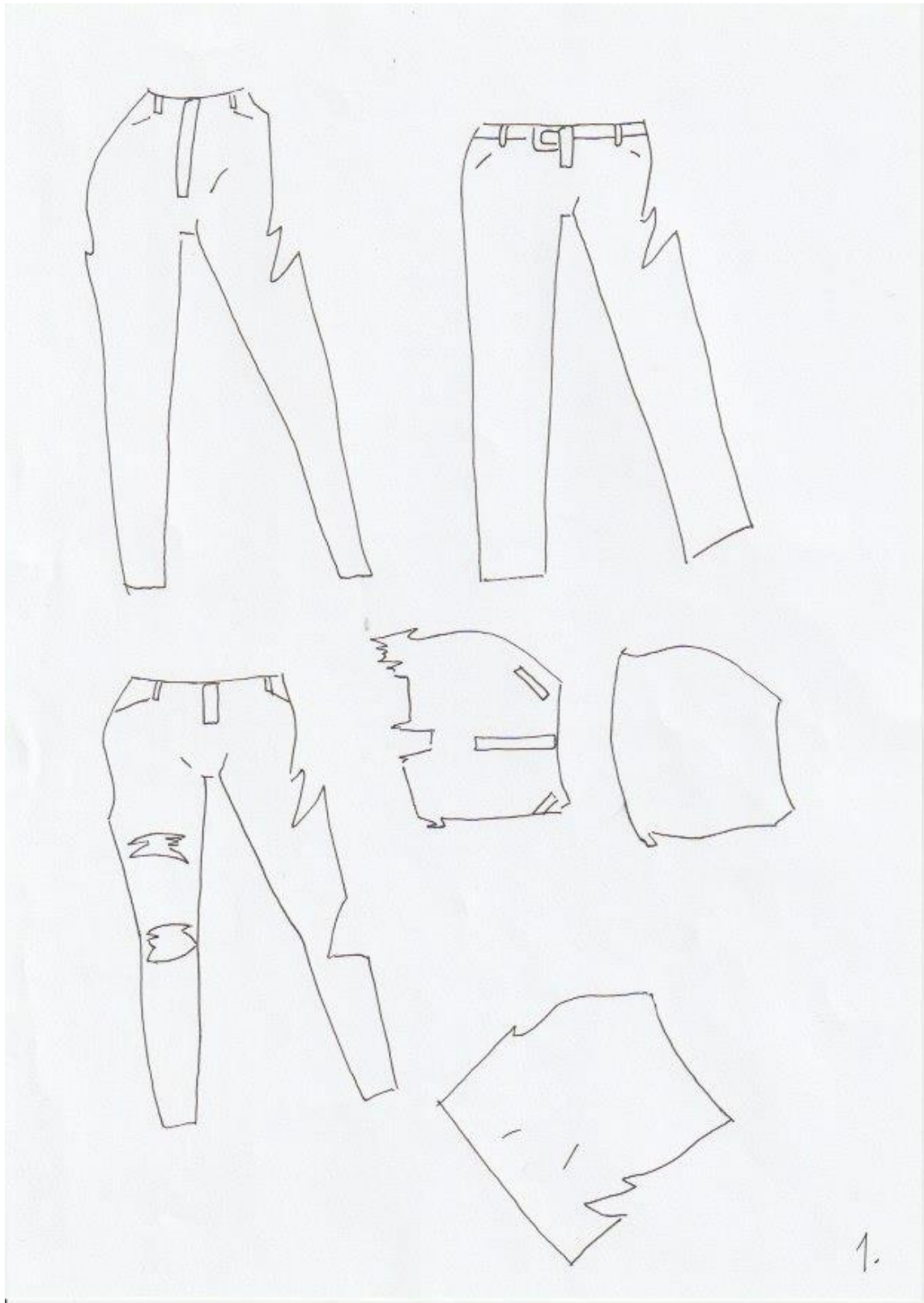


Image 9
Clothing

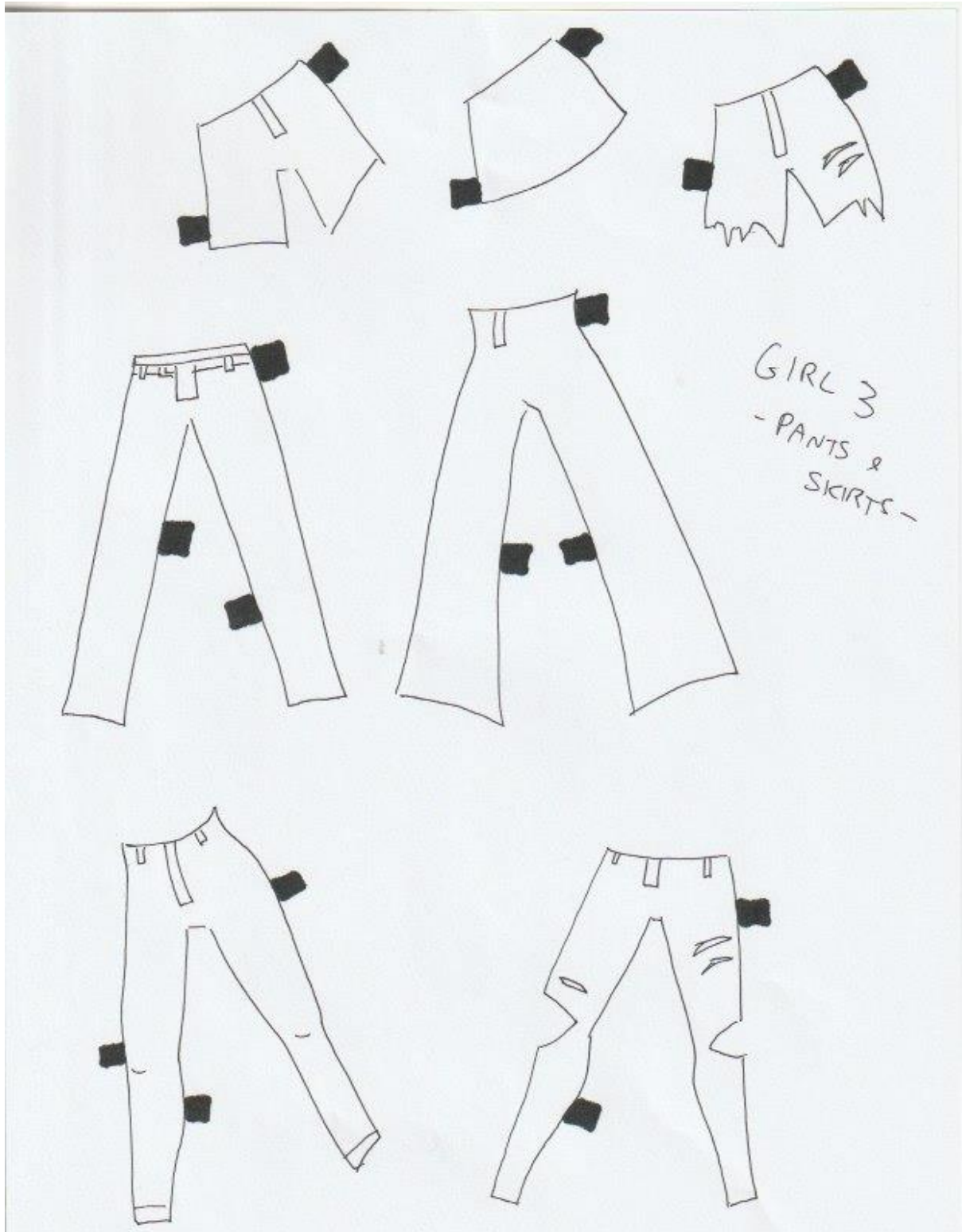


Image 10
Clothing

GIRL 3
TOPS / SHIRTS / JACKETS

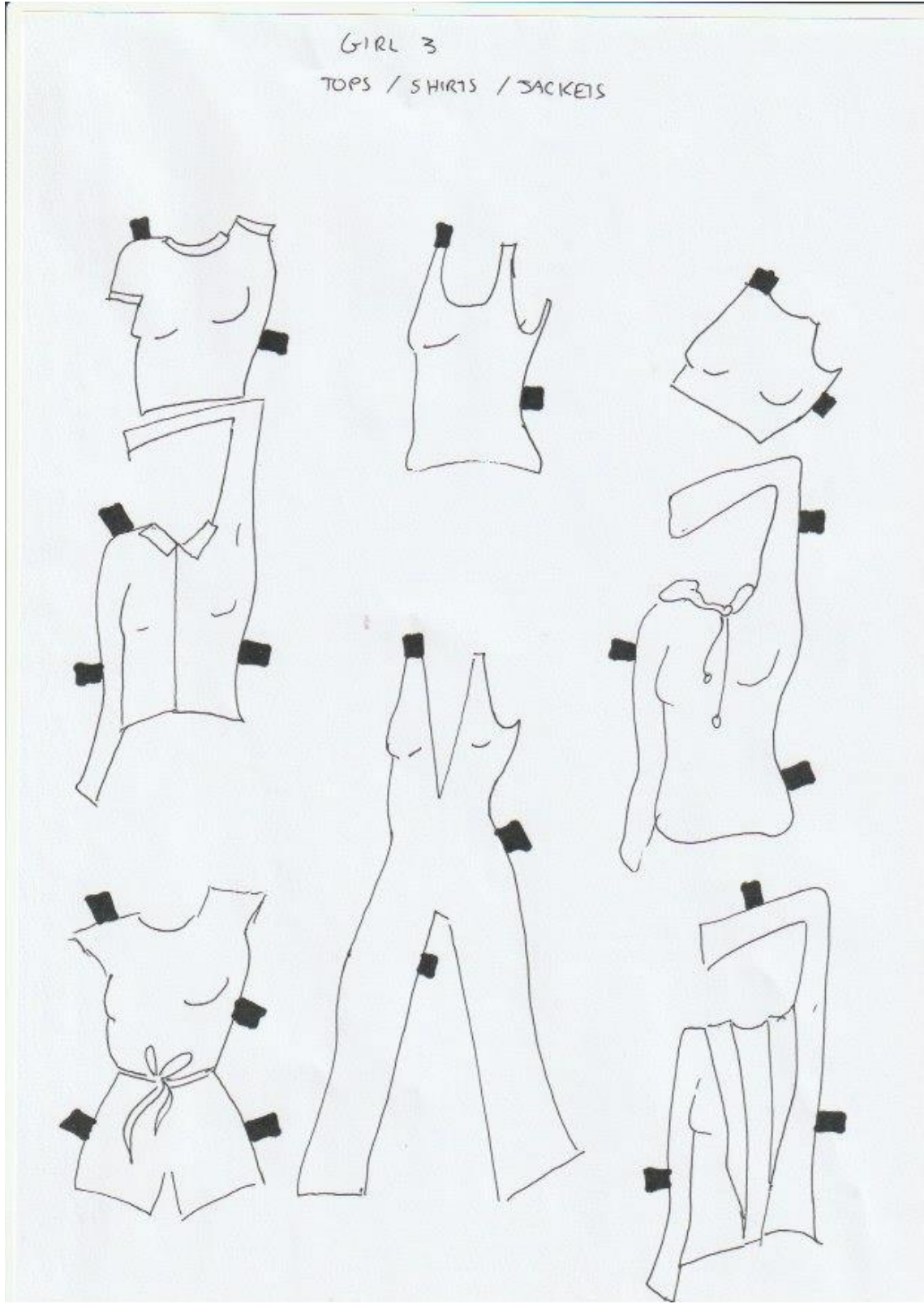


Image 11
Clothing

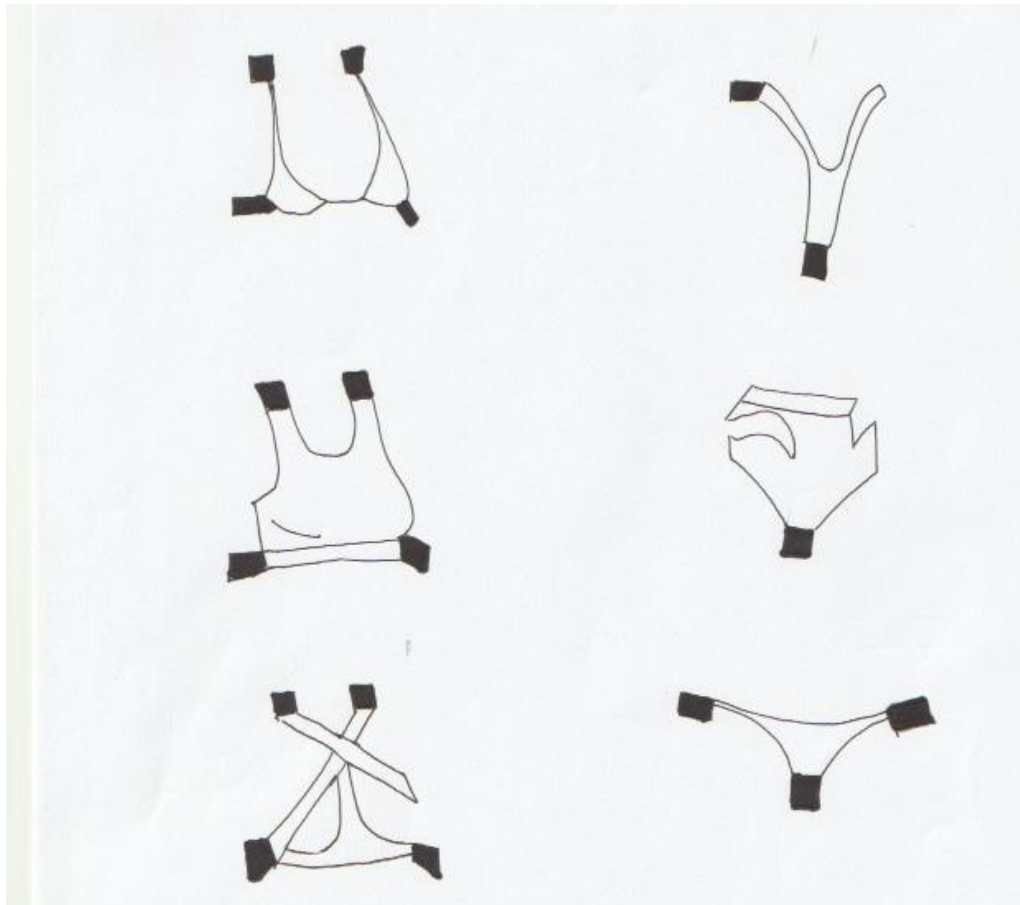


Image 12
Clothing

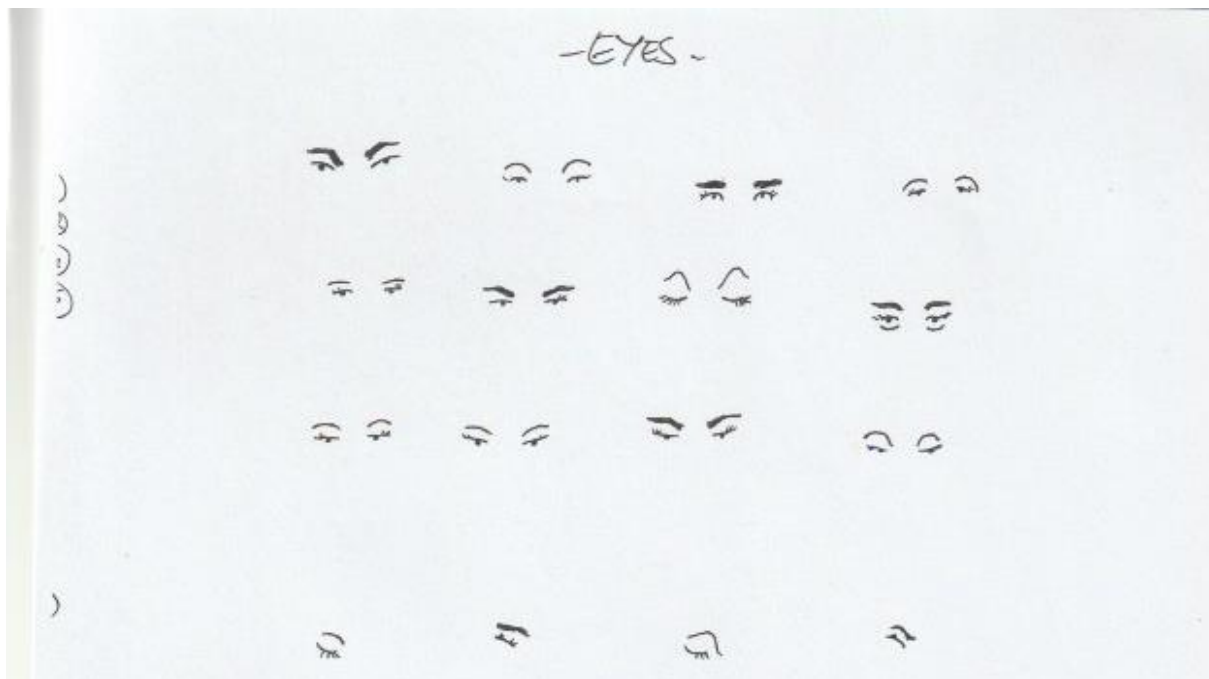


Image 13
Eyes

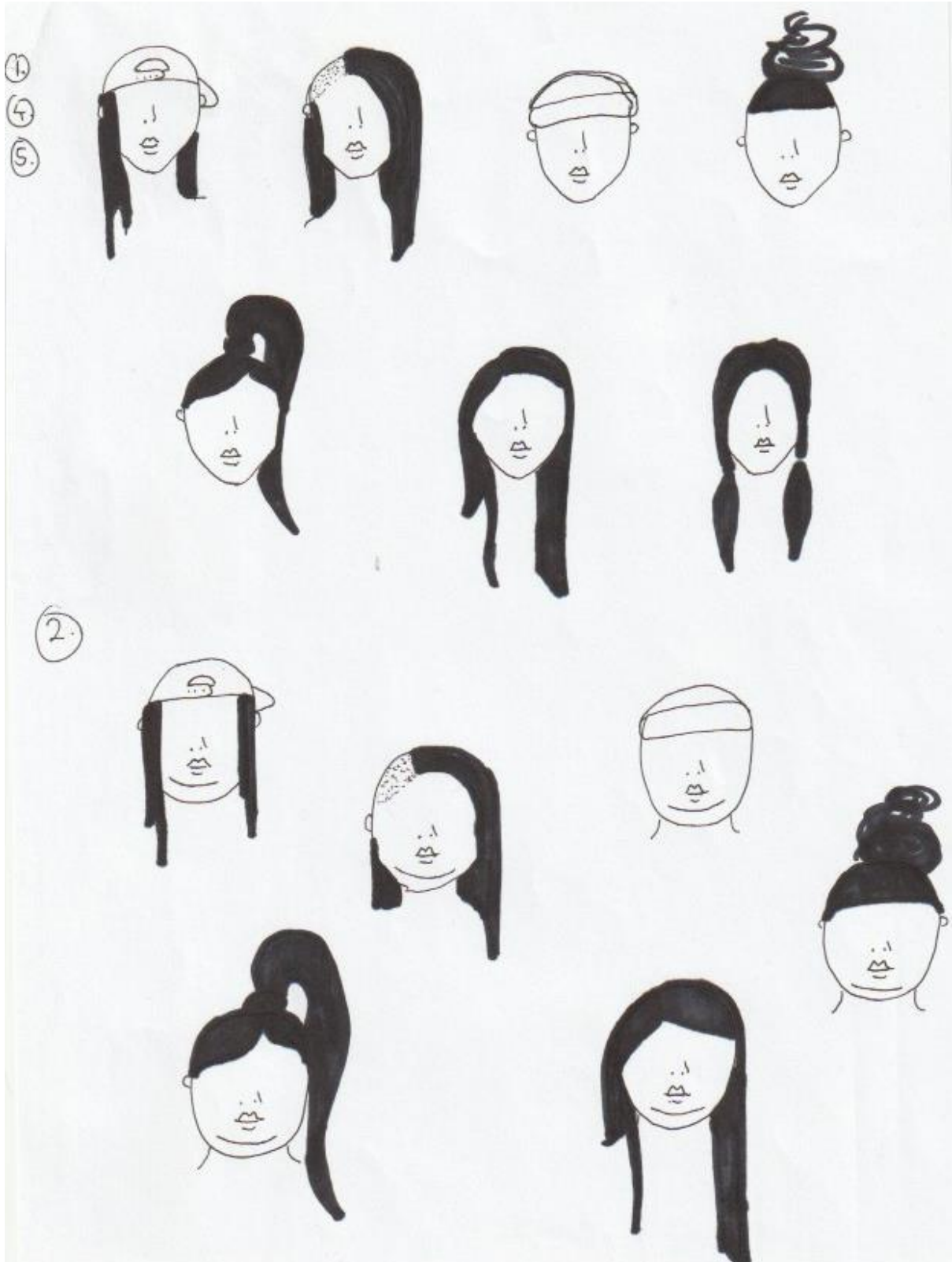


Image 14
Hair and accessories

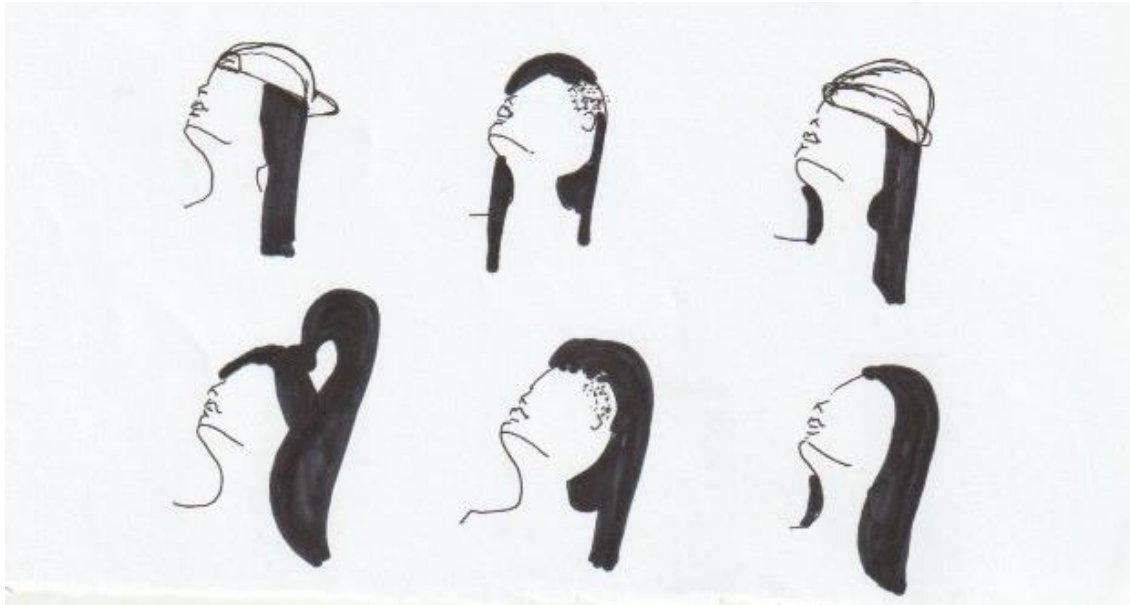


Image 15
Hair and accessories



Image 16
Shoes

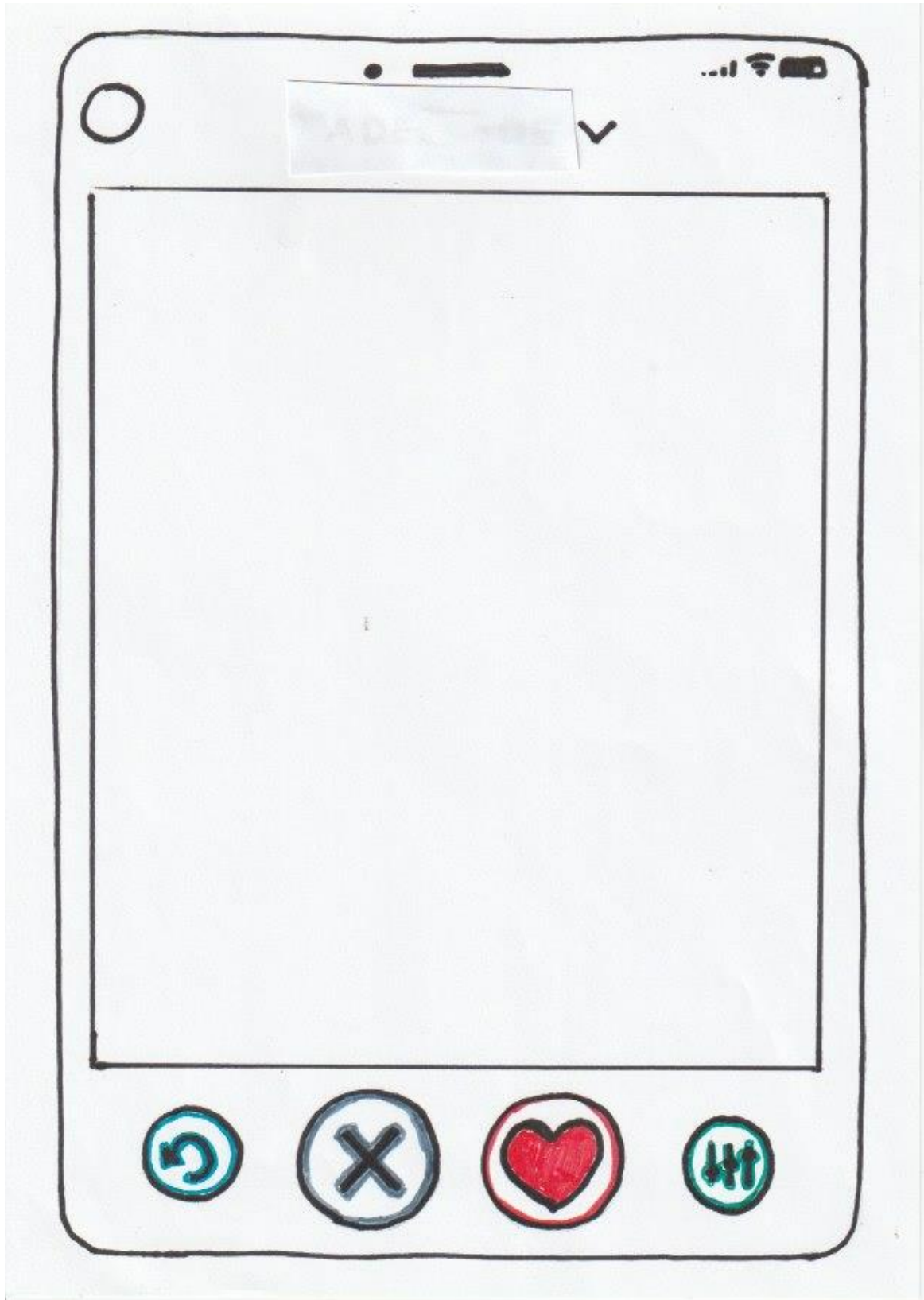


Image 17
Dating profile on Smartphone

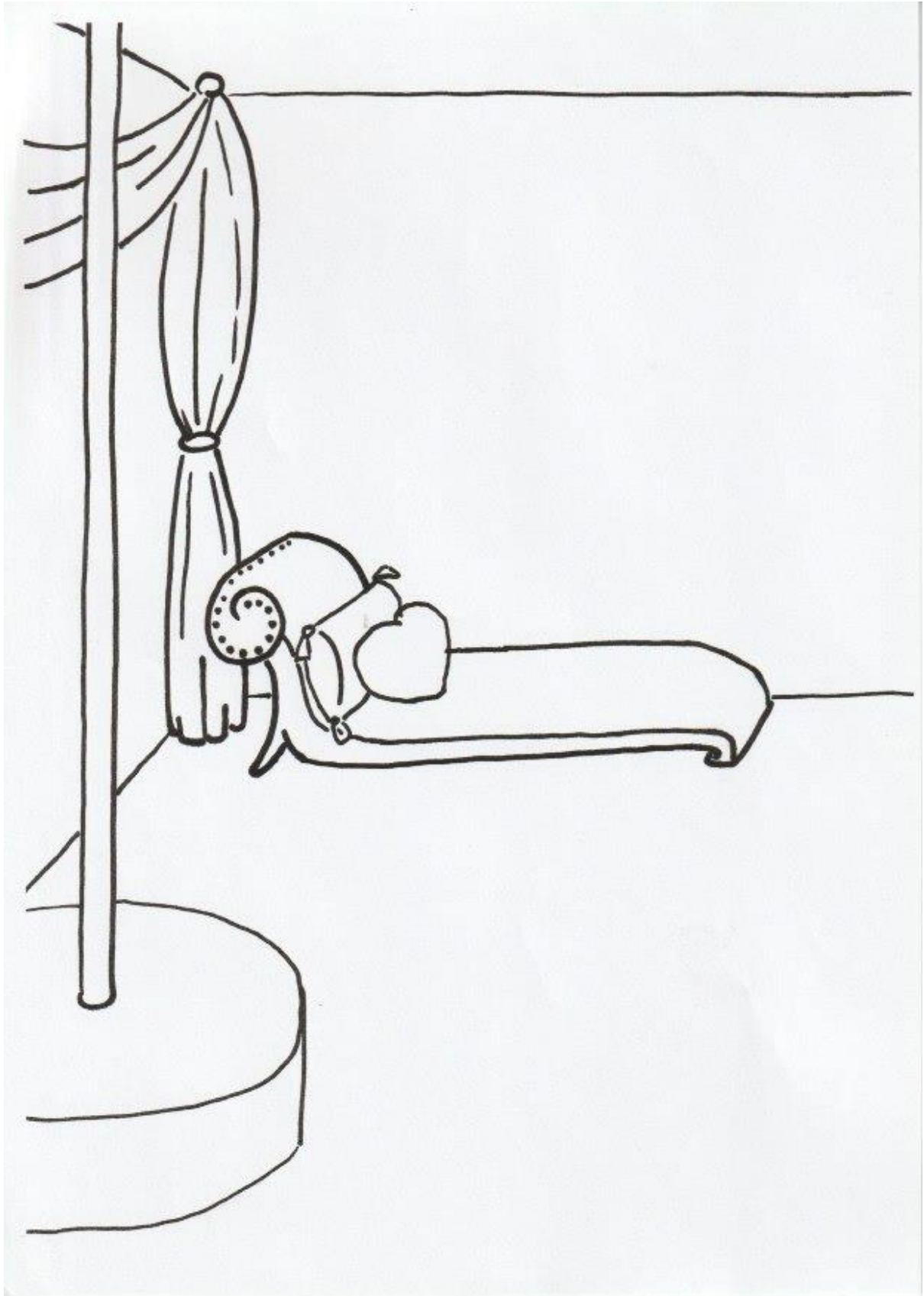


Image 18
Workplace background image

Appendix I: Participants' dolls



Image 19
Alexa 1

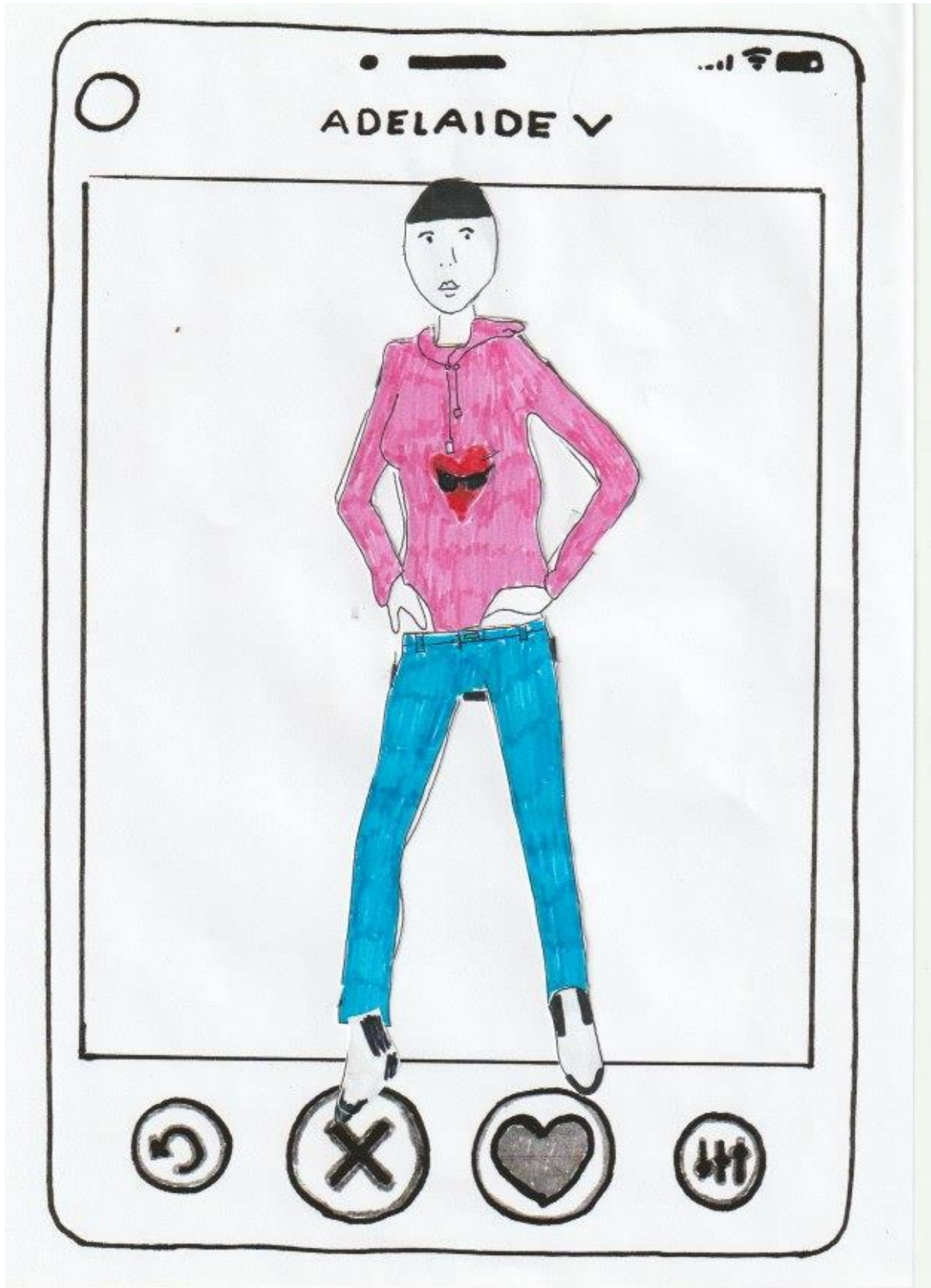


Image 20
Alexa 2



Image 21
Amy 1

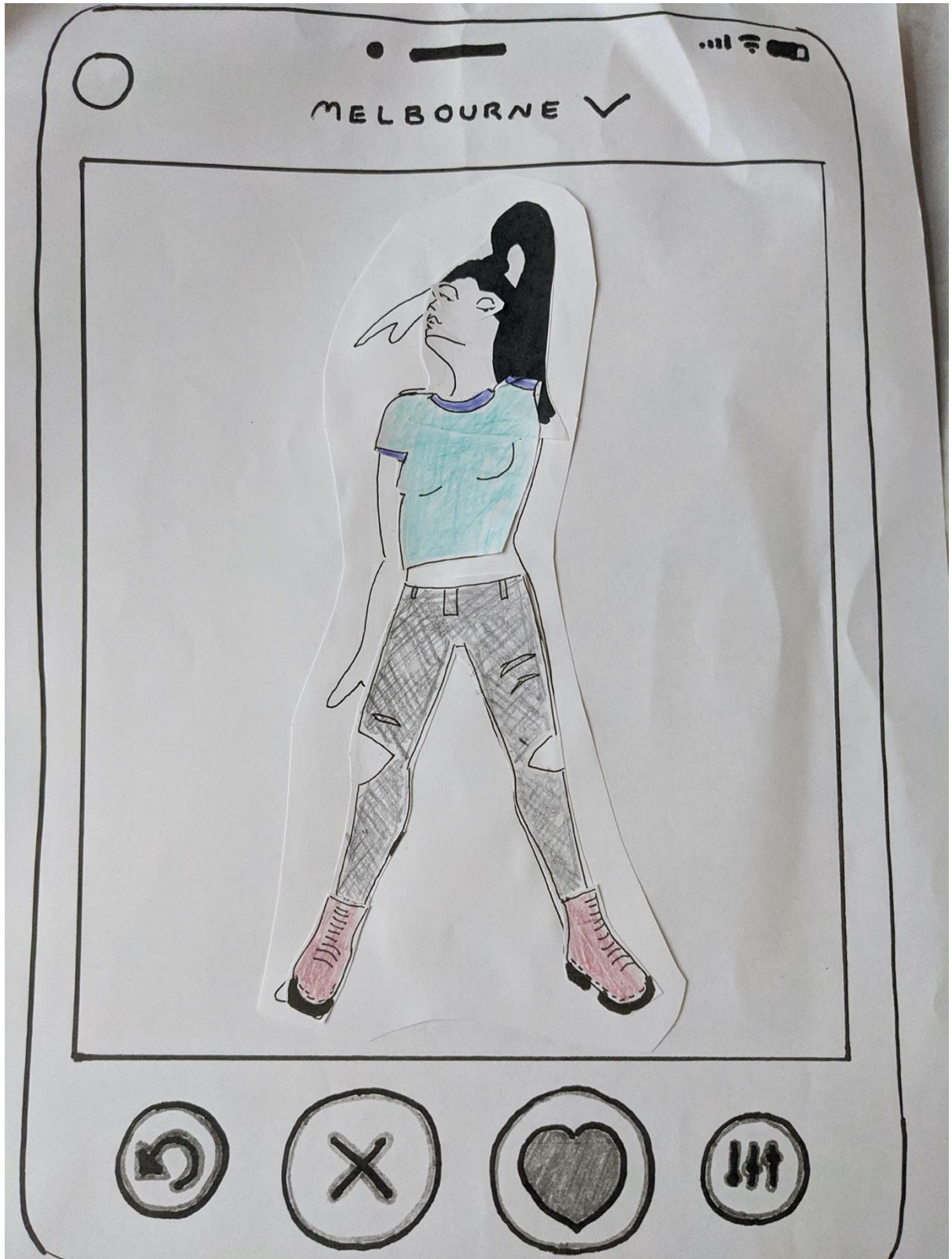


Image 22
Amy 2



Image 23
April 1

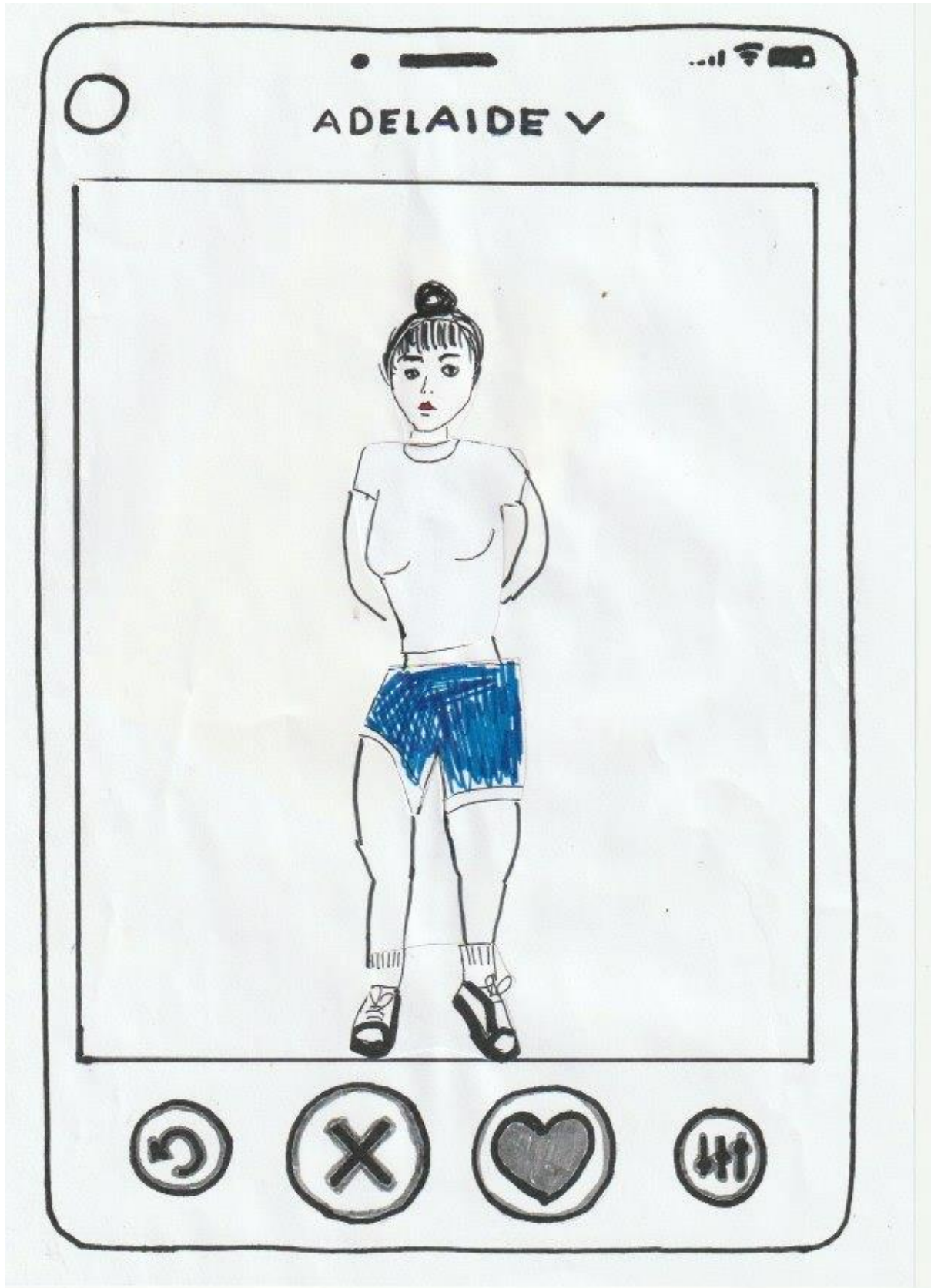


Image 24
April 2

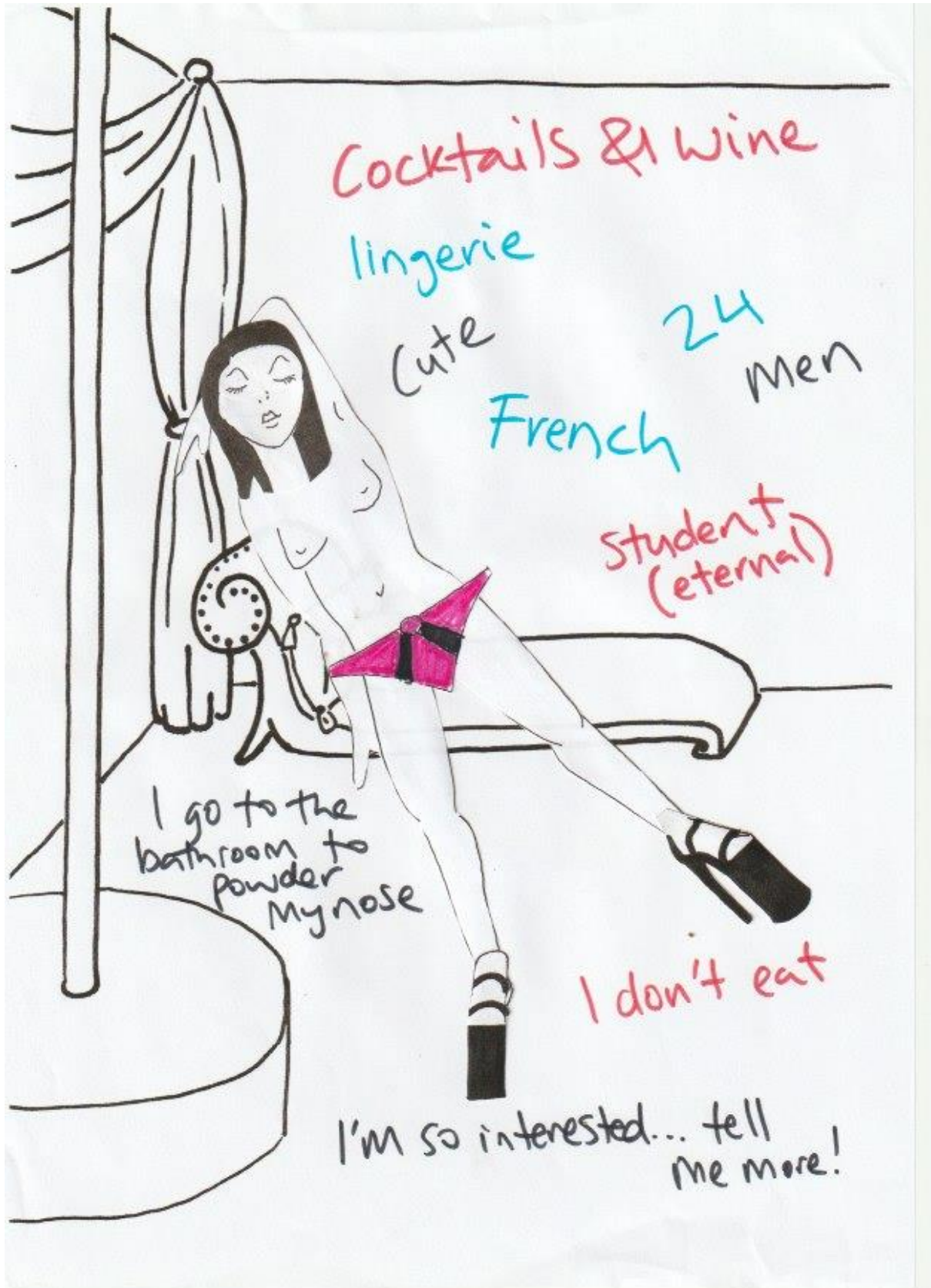


Image 25
Ava 1



Image 26
Ava 2



Image 27
Bella 1



Image 28
Bella 2

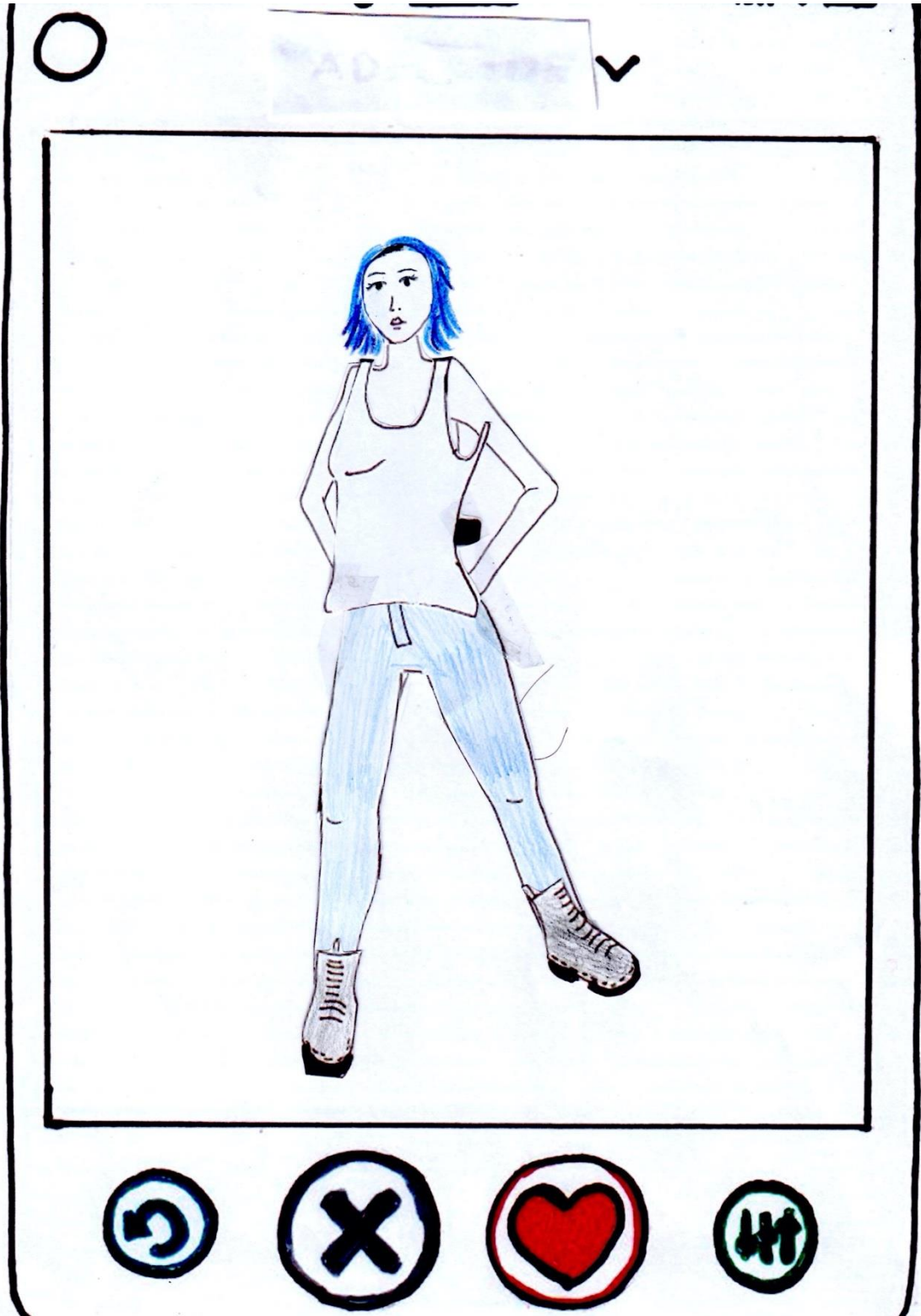


Image 29
Cassie 1

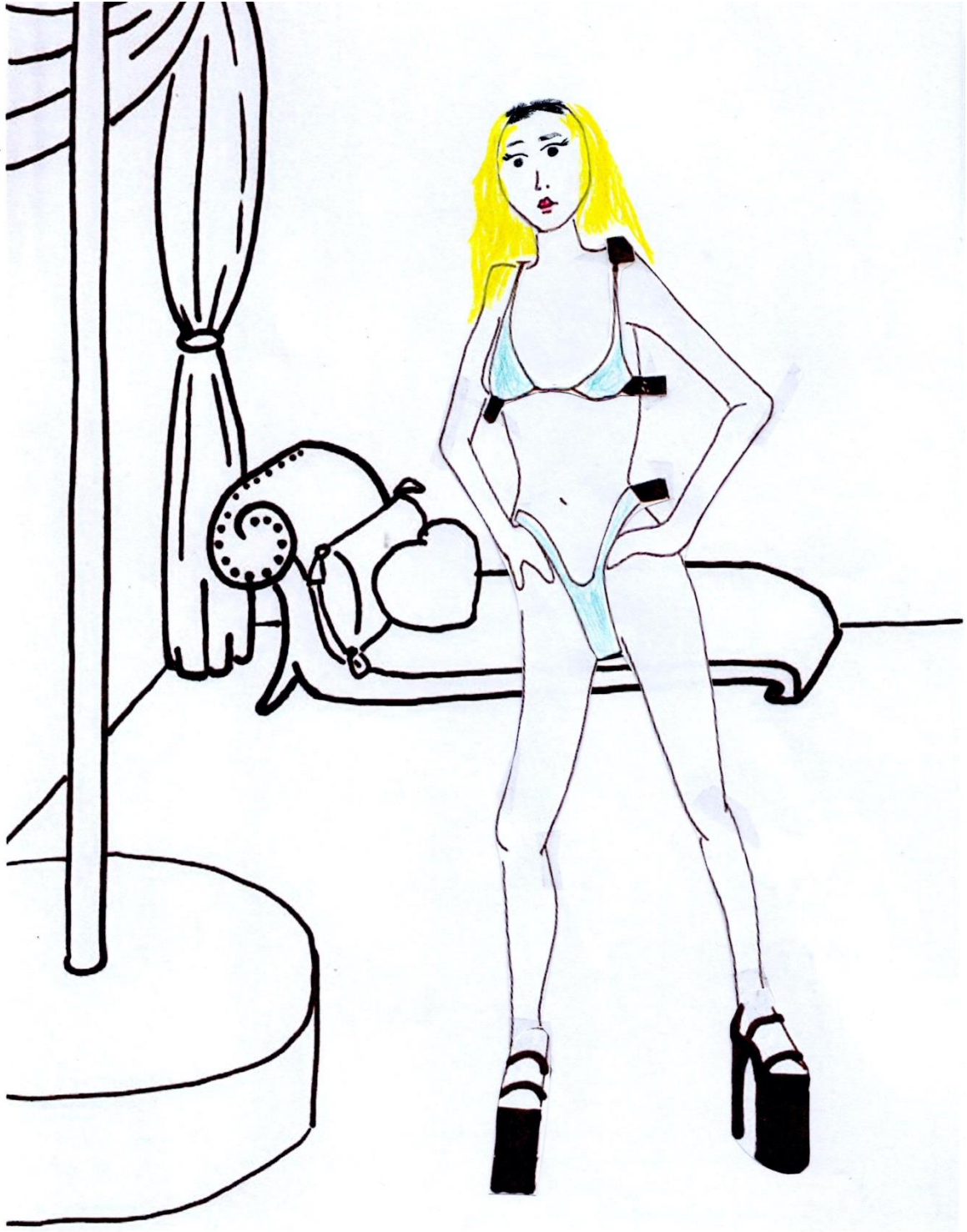


Image 30
Cassie 2



Image 31
Charlie 1



Image 32
Charlie 2

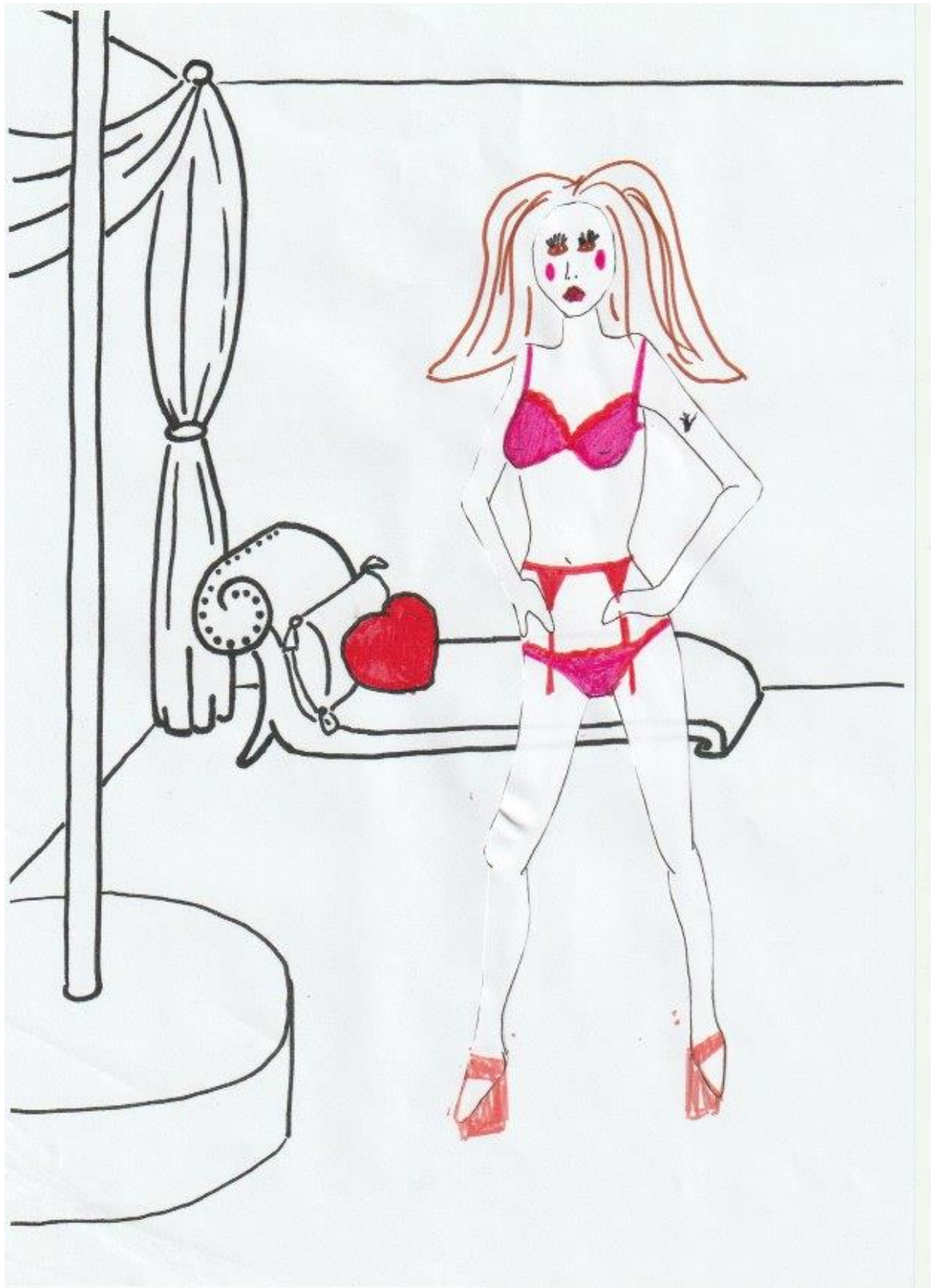


Image 33
Chloe 1



Image 34
Chloe 2

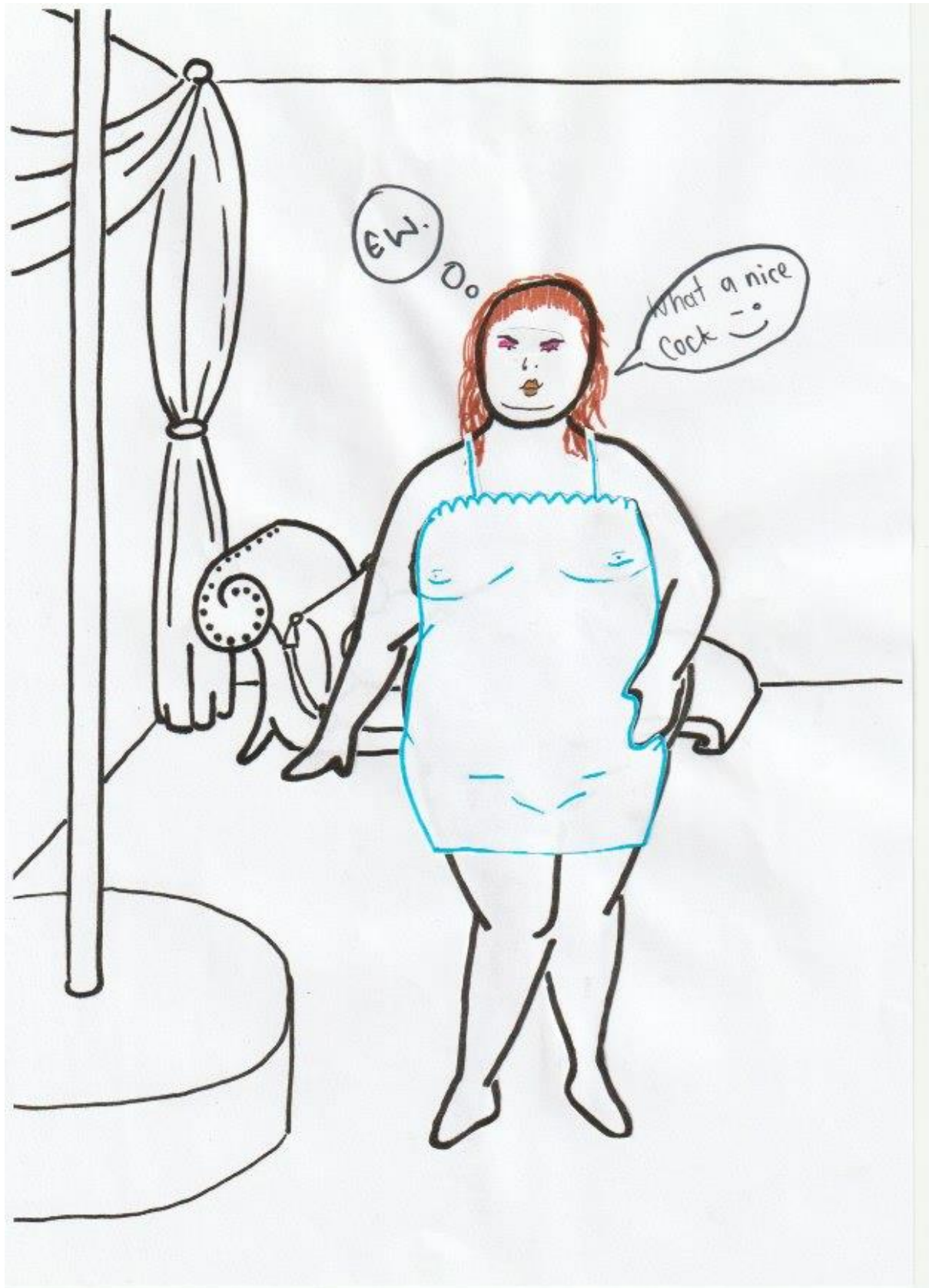


Image 35
E 1



Image 36
E 2



Image 37
Elyse 1



Image 38
Elyse 2



Image 39
Erin 1



Image 40
Erin 2



Image 41
Frankie 1



Image 42
Frankie 2



Image 43
GG 1



Image 44
GG 2



Image 45
Harmony 1



Image 46
Harmony 2

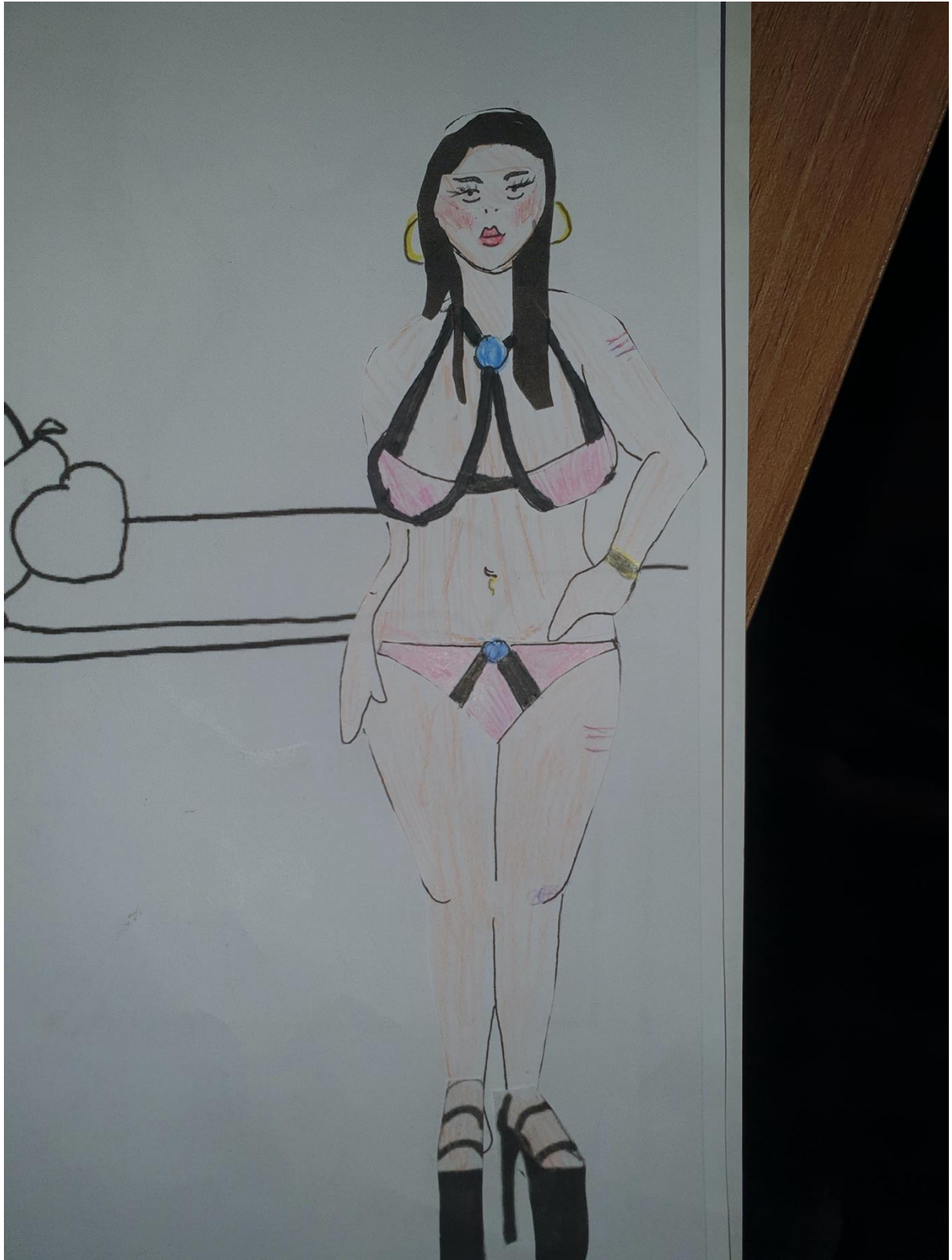


Image 47
Lola 1



Image 48
Lola 2

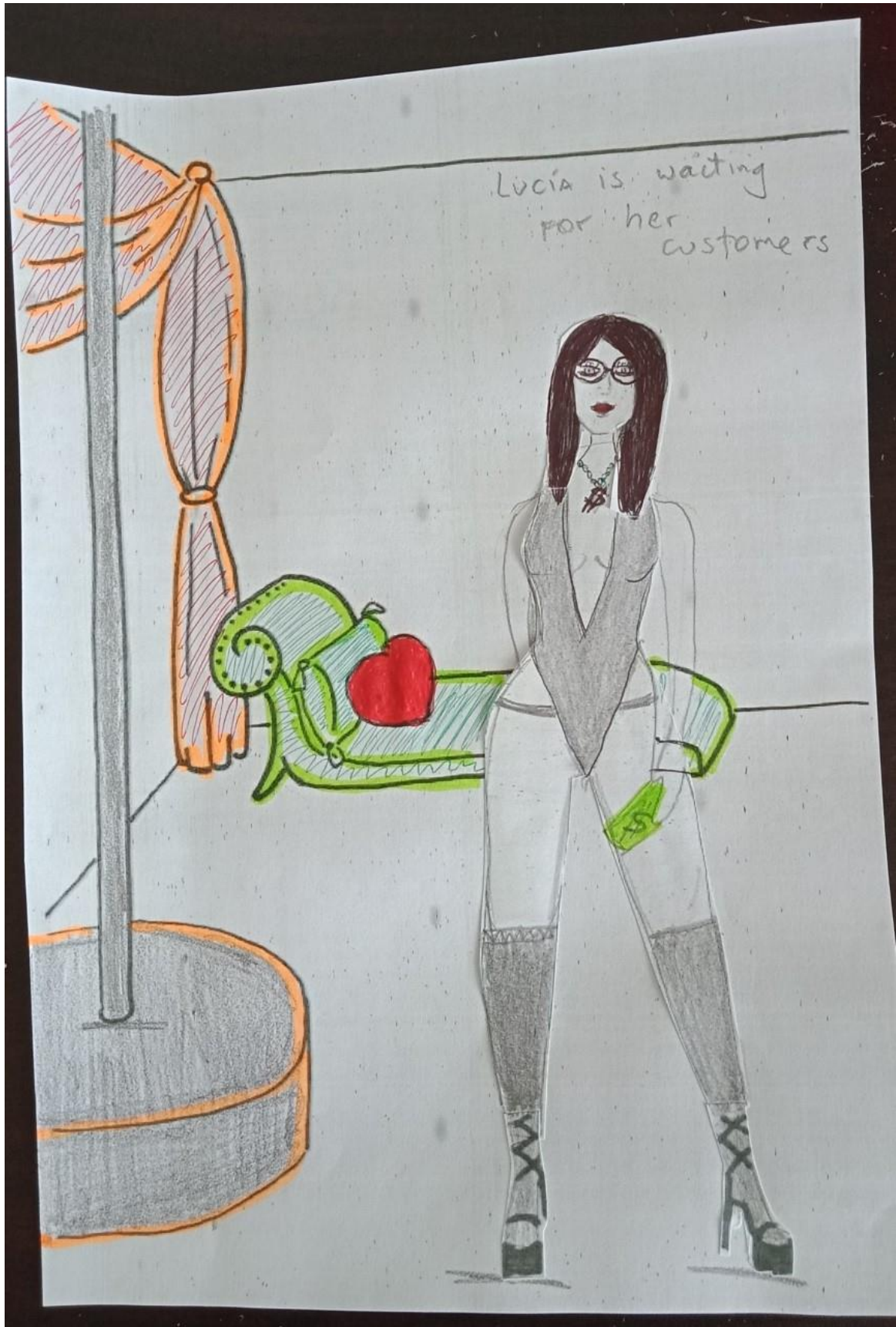


Image 49
Lucia 1

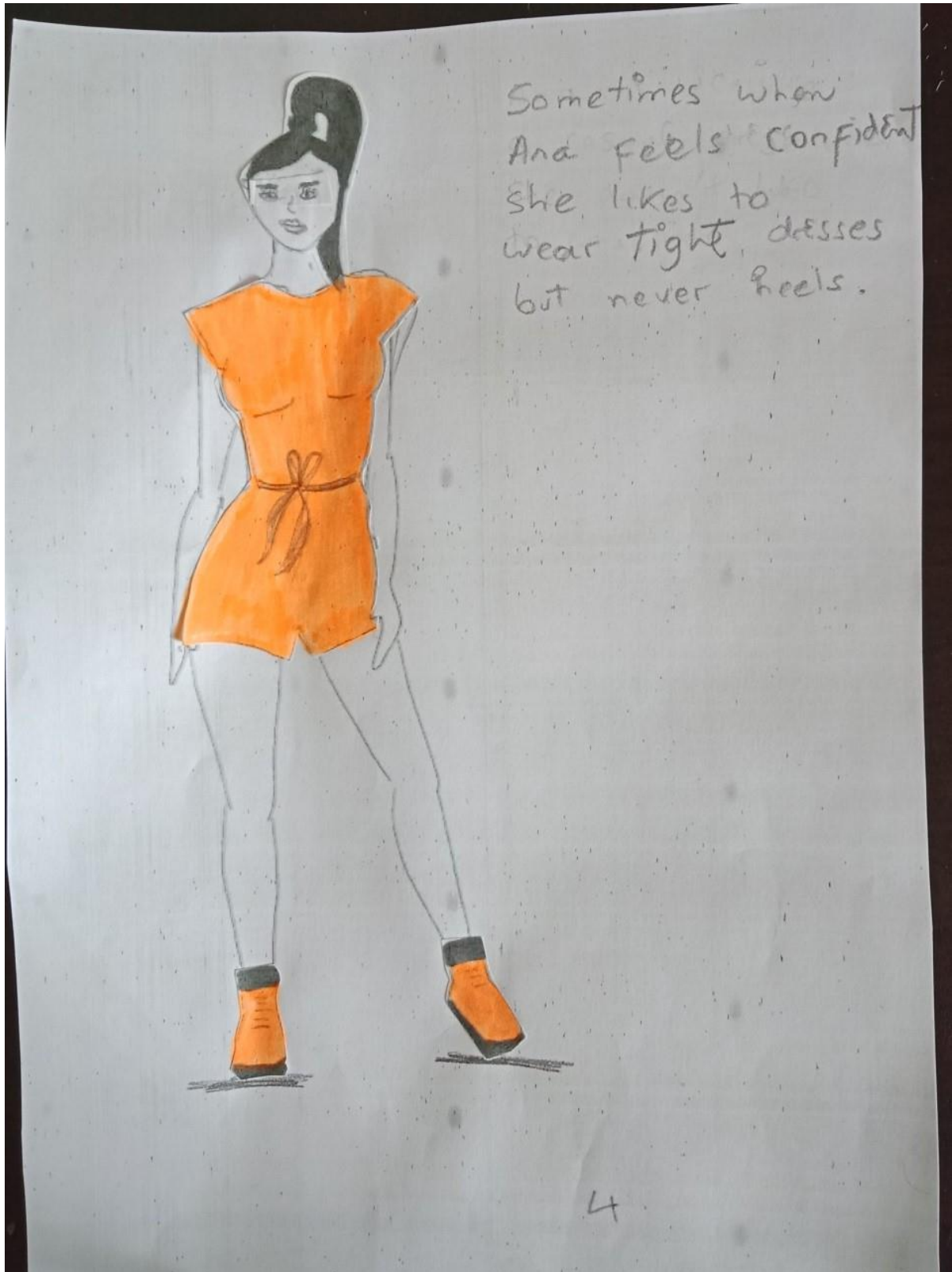


Image 50
Lucia 2

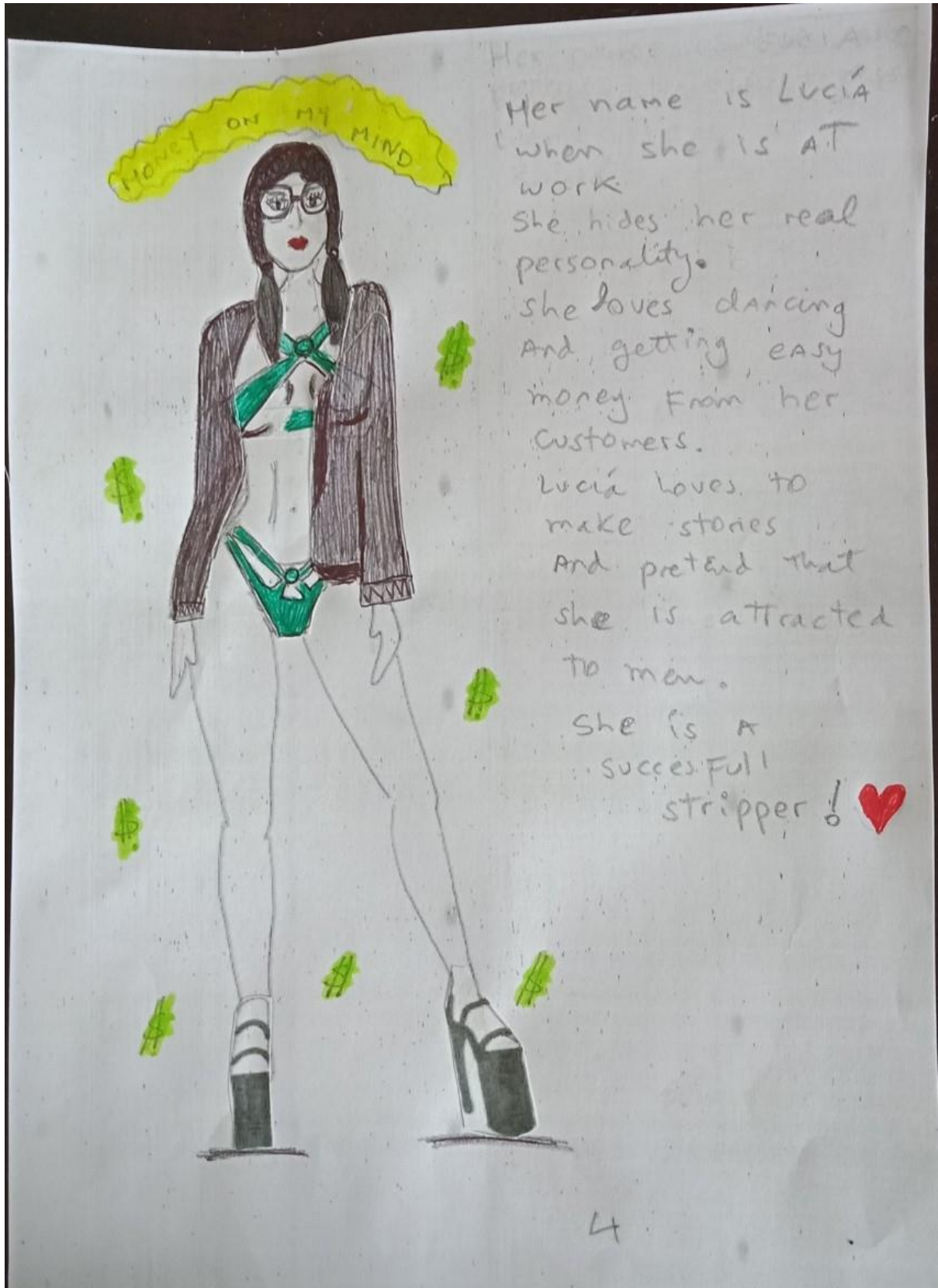
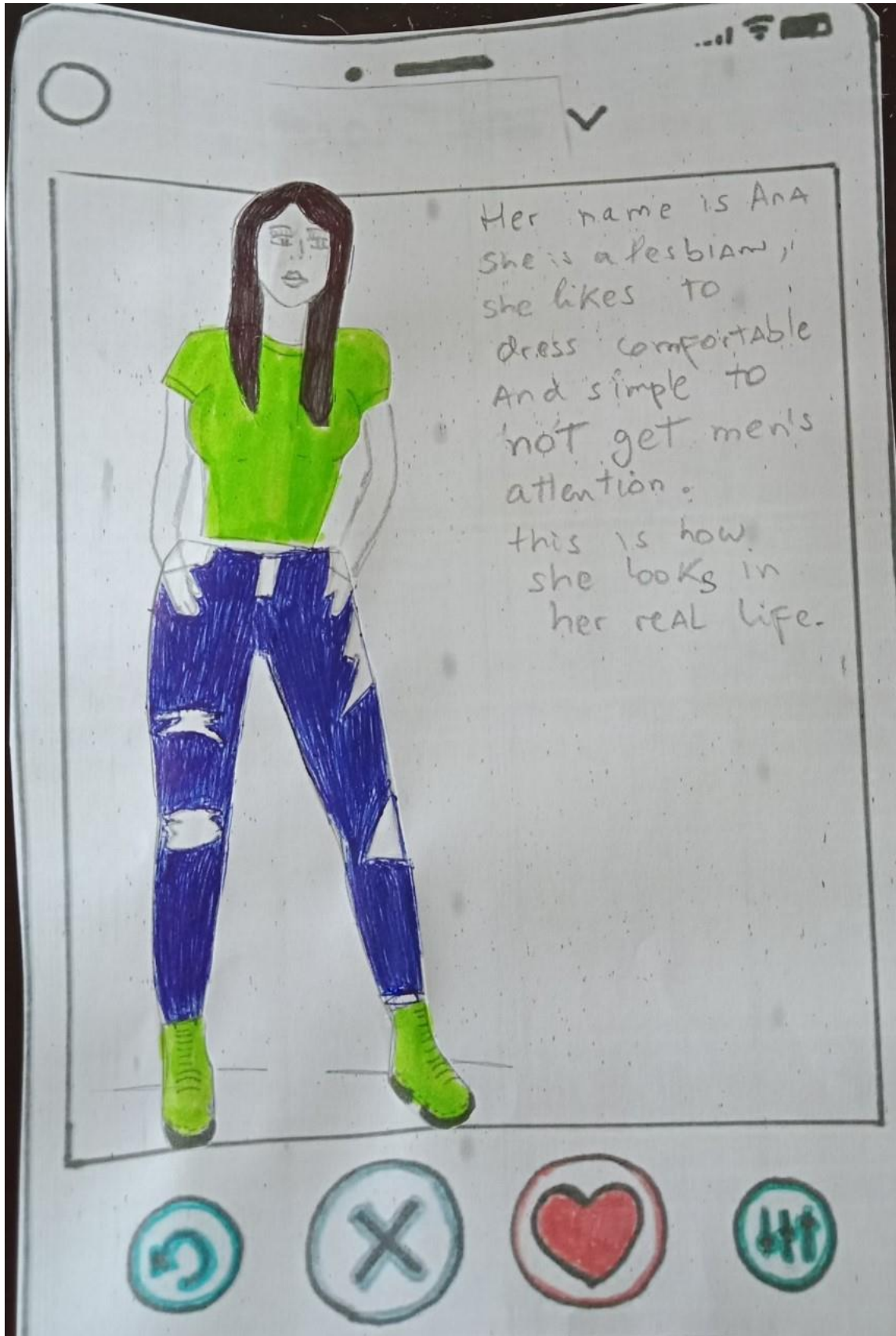


Image 51
Lucia 3



Her name is Ana
She is a lesbian,
she likes to
dress comfortable
And simple to
not get men's
attention.
this is how
she looks in
her REAL life.

Image 52
Lucia 4

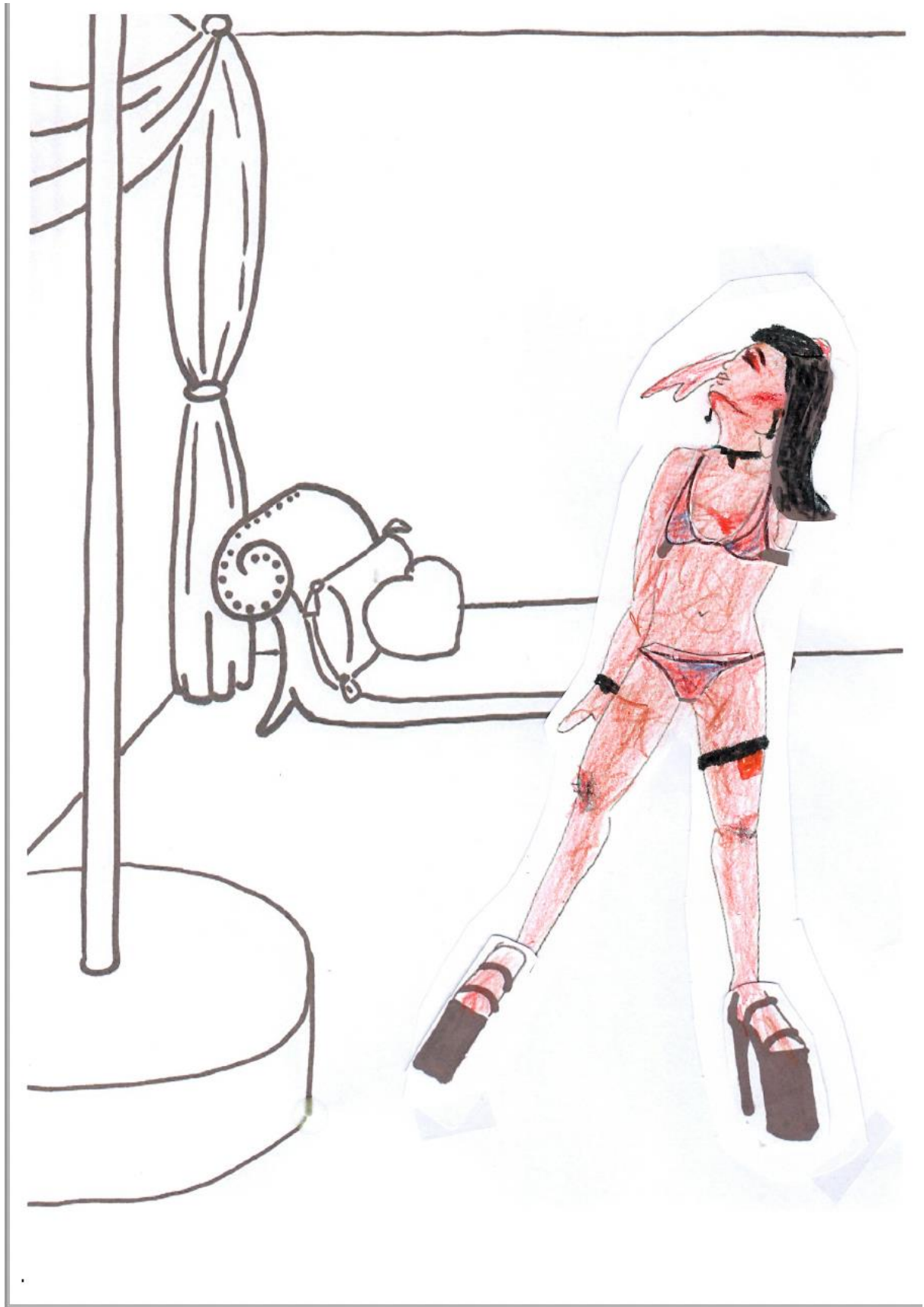


Image 53
M 1

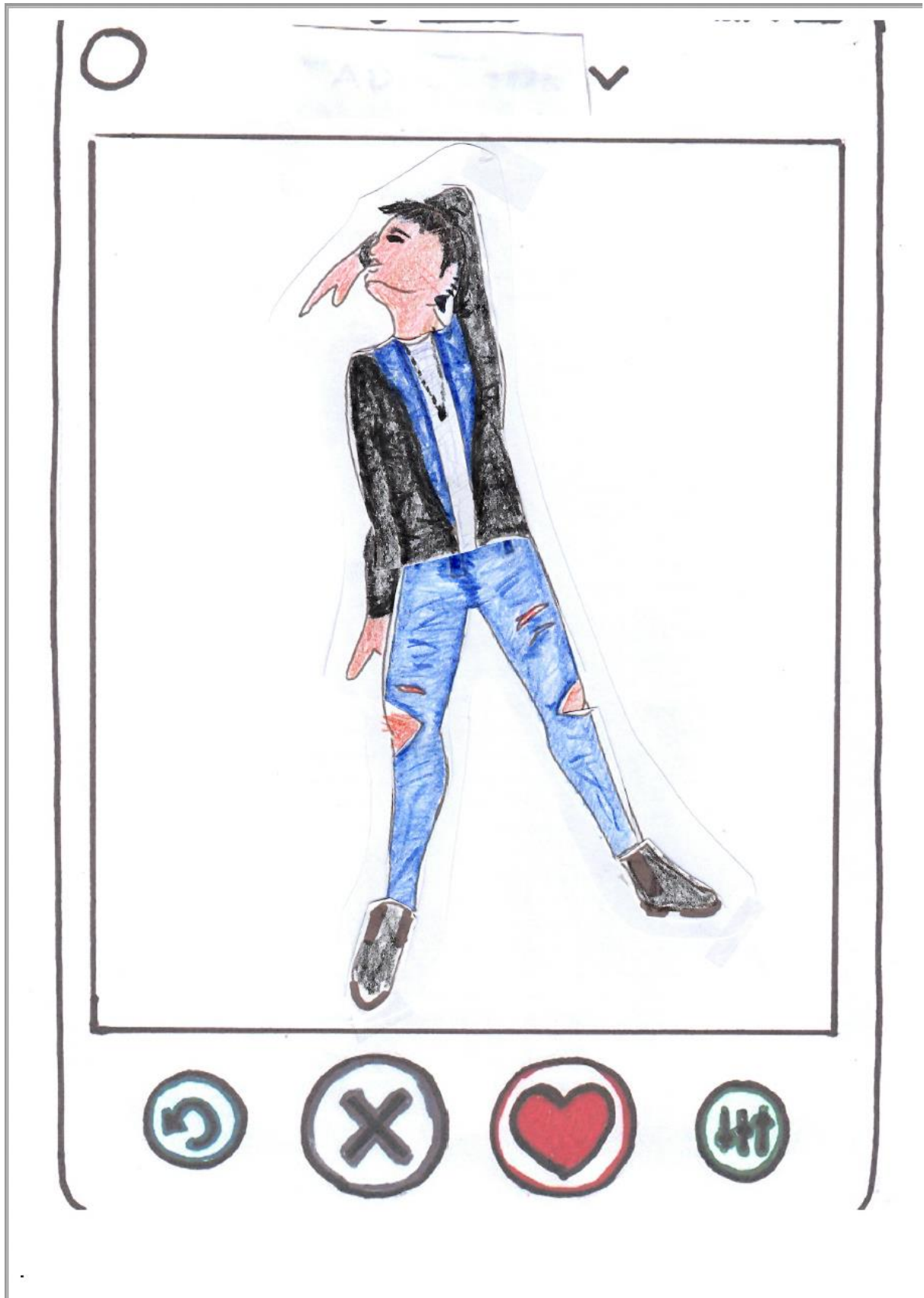


Image 54
M 2

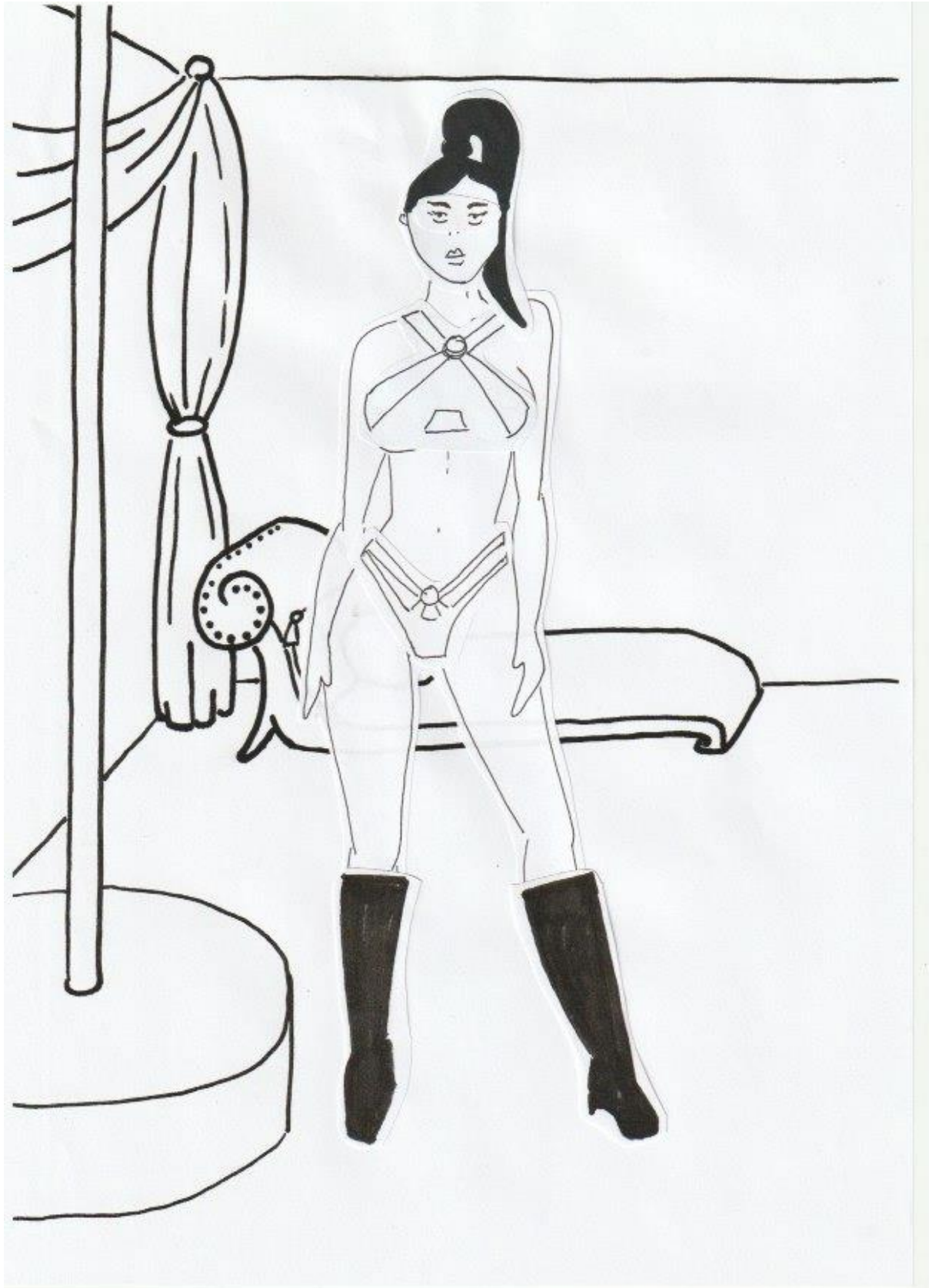


Image 55
Paton 1



Image 56
Paton 2



Image 57
Sasha 1



Image 58
Sasha 2



Image 59
V 1

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